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Desert Hot Springs City Council takes stand opposing Green Path North

Proposal to build transmission lines crossing desert draws criticism

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The Desert Hot Springs City Council voted 5-0 Tuesday to adopt a resolution opposing the Green Path North project, a proposed transmission line that would funnel renewable geothermal energy from the Salton Sea area to Los Angeles and Orange counties.

A path for the line has yet to be chosen, but city officials and local environmentalists are troubled by the routes proposed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

"What you have (are) power lines that want to follow (Highway) 62," Councilman Russell Betts said.

LADWP officials "want us to accept visual blight, loss of homes through eminent domain," he added.

Local officials further worry the project could impact the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, which aims to protect 27 endangered species.

Joan Taylor, a representative of the Tahquitz Group of the Sierra Club, commended the council's decision and spoke out against the LADWP proposal.

"It's great that they want green power," Taylor said after the meeting. But, she added, the utility's transmission lines aren't justified for "destroying the pristine desert."

LADWP representatives did not attend the meeting.

Taylor said she would instead prefer the utility use existing transmission lines that run along Interstate 10.

Claudia Sall, a member of the Yucca Valley-based California Desert Coalition that formed to oppose Green Path North, said she hoped the resolution would draw the attention of other elected officials, particularly U.S. Rep. Mary Bono Mack, R-Palm Springs.

The grassroots coalition formed in March 2007 after its members first heard of the project, and a network of some 450 supporters now comprise the group, Sall said.

LADWP representatives met with concerned residents and environmentalists July 19 in Yucca Valley about the up to 313 miles of power lines that would run through the Coachella Valley and Joshua Tree National Park, as well as Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Sall said the meeting drew considerable opposition.

The proposed line would have an initial capacity of 800 megawatts, which is enough to power more than 500,000 homes.

If approved, the project is expected to be completed by 2020.

Desert Sun reporter Mariecar Mendoza contributed.