

Coalition still hammering against Green Path North

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MORONGO VALLEY — The California Desert Coalition says it has been “hammering” on the Green Path North energy project for 22 months. The CDC held a meeting Feb. 10 in the Morongo Valley Elementary School auditorium, and over 100 folks braved the chilly night to hear the progress report.

On hand to answer the questions were CDC members Dave Miller and Claudia Sall, National Parks Conservation Association regional manager Mike Cipra, Desert Hot Springs Councilman Russell Betts and Desert Energy Committee Chair Joan Taylor. Miller, who is president of Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, told the attendees that Los Angeles citizens are opposing the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power’s Green Path project, especially as it could be a threat to Joshua Tree National Park.

One plan to foil the energy path is to legally declare Big Morongo Canyon Preserve as a protected wilderness attached to Joshua Tree National Park, where no power lines are allowed. That would disrupt the contiguous transmission towers in one Green Path North alternative proposed by the Los Angeles power company.

“The strongest protection for the preserve is as wilderness inside the national park,” explained Cipra, “but the federal legislation process takes years.”

When asked if Green Path North could still go through Pioneertown, or if the Department of Water and Power could do what it wanted before wilderness legislation was successful, Cipra answered “We’re trying to steer them up a different path.”

Using Interstate 10 as an energy corridor has been suggested.

Councilman Betts believes Desert Hot Springs would be devastated if the city’s commercial corridor were replaced by the Green Path North energy corridor.

“Property values in Desert Hot Springs are running behind other communities,” said Betts. “If the powerlines go through, those values are never coming back up. LADWP can’t be dropping extension cords through everyone else’s back yard.”

Los Angeles does seem to be seriously considering energy possibilities other than Green Path. In an effort to meet its goal of 20 percent renewable energy use by 2010, the Department of Water and Power inked a three-year deal earlier this month with Mexico’s state-owned Federal Energy Commission to purchase geothermal energy wholesale from the Cerro Prieto facility in Mexicali.



The non-profit California Desert Coalition is renting this billboard, visible from the eastbound Interstate 10 between Apache Trail in Cabazon and Haugen-Lehman Way in Whitewater.

"The Mexican steam fields are linked to the grid via the Imperial Irrigation District transmission system, a community-owned utility, providing electric power and irrigation water to the Imperial Valley in Southern California," according to Recharge, a renewable energy news source.

The article states LADWP plans to pursue a separate agreement with the Imperial Irrigation District for point-to-point transmission service.

Another alternative-energy approach is Measure B, set to go before Los Angeles voters on March 3. Measure B would authorize the Los Angeles utility to build 400 megawatts worth of solar photovoltaics on land and rooftops inside the city.

Per a Los Angeles Times opinion piece this month, the rooftop-solar measure is supported by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, City Council President Eric Garcetti and state Assembly Speaker Karen Bass.

An important provision of the measure noted in the op-ed piece is that "it would not require the construction of expensive, time-intensive, and environmentally sensitive transmission lines from the desert."

"I've read through Measure B," said Cipra, who was comfortable with what he saw.

An editorial by Bruce M. Pavlik, professor of biology at Mills College in Oakland, ran in the L.A. Times last week. "The biologically rich but arid desert ecosystems are remarkably fragile," Pavlik wrote. "Once topsoil and plant life have been disrupted for the placement of solar arrays, wind farms, power plants, transmission lines and CO2 scrubbers, restoration would be cost-prohibitive, if not technically impossible."

According to the Bureau of Land Management, 170 applications are pending for wind and solar projects on California public lands, on a total of 1.8 million acres. The BLM has been directed by the Secretary of the Interior to open renewable energy coordination offices to facilitate the permitting process.

According to the BLM's California State Director, Mike Pool, "We will take further steps, both internally and externally, to improve efficiencies and expedite processing of these proposals."

Opposition from many corners

Support for the California Desert Coalition's cause has come from all over Southern California. The County of Riverside, San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, and most recently the Coachella Valley Association of Governments have joined the City of Desert Hot Springs, Yucca Valley Town Council, Morongo Valley Community Services District, Joshua Tree Municipal Advisory Council, Twentynine Palms City Council, Gorgonio Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Lucerne Valley Economic Development Association, Johnson Valley Improvement Association and the Homestead Valley Community Council in adopting formal resolutions opposing Green Path North.

"No one has told us to give up," says Miller. "This is a good American grassroots story. We're not losing this battle."