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Guest Soapbox: L.A. power department: the evil of secrecy

By Ron Fein / Pioneertown

It all started in 1904 when the fledgling Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) issued its first public report: "The time has come when we shall have to supplement the supply from some other source." This was in reference to water and the subsequent impoverishment of the Owens Valley. LADWP used coercion, spies, bribery and a complex system of lies to accomplish the task of robbing an idyllic region of its life-blood. Hard-working citizens lost their land and communities were destroyed. This story is well documented in Marc Reisner's book "Cadillac Desert."

Now LADWP is attempting a similar operation in the Mojave and Colorado deserts. The names and politics have changed, but the objectives are the same. This time it is not water, but electricity.

The proposed Green Path North would be a 500 kilovolt power line, cutting through pristine regions in Morongo Valley, Pioneertown, Pipes Canyon, Flamingo Heights, Homestead Valley and Johnson Valley, among others. A mile-wide swath would run through nature preserves, wildlands, private property, natural areas and public land.

LADWP is calling it "green," meaning that the electricity being produced for the lines would be from renewable sources: solar, wind and geothermal. In reality, the primary source of electricity would be from a nuclear power plant.

LADWP and its affiliates own approximately 12 percent of the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station, just outside Phoenix. The Arizona Corporation Commission last year denied a 500 KV transmission line between Palo Verde and the Devers substation in North Palm Springs. Devers is the proposed junction for Green Path North. It is not difficult to do the math.

The potency of nuclear transmission far surpasses any renewables that LADWP is thinking of. A new transmission line was recently approved between Palo Verde and Yuma, right at the California border next to the Imperial Valley, where Green Path North is supposed to begin. One way or another, LADWP is determined to have that nuclear power.

Even David Nahai, General Manager of LADWP, has admitted that nuclear-generated power from Palo Verde would be passing through the Green Path North lines. But he qualified this by saying it would only be "existing" energy. Obviously, if the energy is being produced, it exists.

Another secret lingers at the Mexican border. While immigration laws are currently closing the border, cross-border power lines are booming. In particular, the Imperial Valley-La Rosita international power crossing connects to LADWP's Green Path North proposed point of origin. LADWP has made a case to begin there for its geothermal potential. But Mexican power sources are much more attractive. Power companies Intergen and Sempra Energy are cashing in on cheap natural gas, and building plants in Mexico for sale to U.S. markets. LADWP is ready to link up to these sources.

LADWP wants its own power line in the Imperial Valley, North Palm Springs and Mojave Desert, so it can all be claimed as "green." While the Green Path North proposed route is illogical, LADWP would gain significantly by having it. As in 1904 land would be lost and communities destroyed by devious and selfish means. The truth remains a secret. Until now.