



Progress seen in battle against energy path

By Rebecca Unger / Hi-Desert Star

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YUCCA VALLEY — The California Desert Coalition gave the citizens of the Morongo Basin a progress report on the fight against the Green Path North energy project Thursday night. Playing over the Yucca Room's sound system as people filled the hall was an incessant electronic chatter, a recording of the noise made by the kind of high-tension powerlines that would be used by Green Path North, CDC members said.

Since the Morongo Basin's July meeting at Yucca Valley High School with Los Angeles Water and Power General Manager David Nahai and other project supporters, the members of the California Desert Coalition and other local conservation groups have been moving around the state in efforts to stop Los Angeles from creating a high-energy transmission tower corridor through the high desert.

Proposed to tap the geothermal resources of Salton Sea, the towers would cut through Desert Hot Springs, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, Pioneertown's Pipes Canyon Preserve and the hills along Old Woman Springs Road that wind through Yucca Mesa, Flamingo Heights, Landers and Johnson Valley, up to Hesperia's aging power lines and on to the bright lights, high-rises, spas and flat screens of Los Angeles.

"We have a lot to protect, a lot to fight for," the CDC's April Sall warned Nahai in July. And thanks to the volunteer hours and miles contributed by Sall and others, the CDC believes the fight is having an effect.

The CDC has embarked on a political outreach and education program, meeting and/or speaking with four state and two federal decision makers, including the governor's Energy Advisor Darren Bouton, Senators Bob Dutton, Diane Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and re-elected local representatives U.S. Congressman Jerry Lewis and state Assemblyman Paul Cook.

"We have met with Congresswoman Mary Bono Mack," Sall related. "She was disinterested in February of 2007 because she didn't get the idea, but may now join us in the effort."

The National Parks Conservation Association's Mike Cipra, who operates as a California Desert Program Manager out of Joshua Tree, is going to Washington, D.C., on behalf of the Basin.

"It's about a community coming together and articulating what it wants to see for its future," Cipra explained.

The CDC's done public outreach and education, too, in an effort to alert the citizens of Los Angeles to the ramifications of the proposed power grid. In September, Sall and fellow Desert Coalition member Ruth Reiman appeared on Los Angeles radio station KPFK's "Healthy Planet, Healthy Me" program, with Nahai commenting by phone and a listener call-in segment.

Last month, children colored the "Stop Green Path" poster by Joshua Tree artist Rik Livingston and sent them LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

"What began as an angry battle has become a conversation," the Desert Coalition was pleased to report.

The California Independent System Operator, the not-for-profit corporation that operates most of the state's high-voltage wholesale power grid, has publicly criticized the Los Angeles power department for not being open and transparent.

Southern California Edison, whom Nahai touted as a potential partner on Green Path North, says talks with LADWP have been "non-productive" on the project, according to the Desert Coalition.

Although there has been increased awareness and support, don't think that the boxing gloves have come off just yet.

The LADWP has scheduled a meeting with the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forestry Service for today.

The BLM is the lead agency on the project, in charge of 60 percent of the real estate where the towers would go.

The LADWP plans to publish its Notice of Intent early next year, and Sall said "That starts the clock"

"The desert's cycles run over millions of years," remarked the Desert Coalition's David Miller. "We come in, bulldoze and grade, and we've done a million year cycle in 60 years."