PE.com
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Concerns raised over proposed power lines in desert

10:00 PM PST on Tuesday, November 20, 2007
By IMRAN GHORI
The Press-Enterprise

A proposal to build power transmission lines through desert communities in San Bernardino and Riverside counties is raising concerns among residents and officials.

The 500-kilovolt Green Path North project, proposed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, would scar desert vistas and cut through environmentally sensitive preserves, opponents told San Bernardino County supervisors Tuesday.

"It's an attack on our quality of life," said April Sall, co-chair of the California Desert Coalition, a group formed in opposition to the project.

Electrical towers and power lines would be installed from Desert Hot Springs to Hesperia in order to transmit energy from geothermal, solar and wind projects in the Imperial Valley. Depending on the route chosen, the lines would traverse between 79 to 350 miles through areas such as the Morongo Valley, Yucca Valley and Pioneertown.

Supervisor Dennis Hansberger, whose district includes some of the areas affected, is proposing the board take a stand at its Dec. 4 meeting. He asked for the presentation from the coalition.

The project does not require approval from either county as the power lines are being proposed on federal land, requiring assent from the Bureau of Land Management.

Federal and county plans already designate Interstate 10 as the preferred route for power transmission lines but the Green Path North project would tread into other desert areas, Sall said.

She and about a dozen other residents who spoke at the meeting say Green Path North only benefits Los Angeles customers and not those in San Bernardino or Riverside counties.

Randy Howard, assistant chief operating officer for the power system at the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, said the project is in its early stages and that several routes, including along Interstate 10, are being considered.

"No decision has been made," he said.

Howard said the project would provide economic benefits to communities in the Salton Sea, where geothermal plants would create jobs. It would also provide environmental benefits by increasing the use of renewable energy sources instead of increasing carbon emissions, he said.

"It will have a very big impact on all of Southern California, and maybe globally," he said.

Opponents said they only learned about the project earlier this year and accused the power company of trying to sneak the project through.

Howard said the utility is planning informational meetings, including a chance to comment on alternatives and the environmental study, but those had been scheduled for early next year.

Hansberger said he is concerned that the power lines would cut through some relatively pristine desert areas.

"The existing transmission corridor that runs roughly parallel to Interstate 10 is more appropriate," he said.

Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, who represents the High Desert, said he is troubled by the increasing number of energy projects in desert areas that take up large amounts of land.

"The desert stands to take the brunt of the impact for the rest of the state and society and that doesn't sit well with me," he said.

Riverside County officials are aware of the project but have yet to take a position, county spokesman Ray Smith said.