

Power-line route nears release Opponents say plan lacking public input

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After months of silence on the issue, the chief of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has said the agency is nearly ready to announce the route it has chosen for Green Path North, the proposed energy corridor in the desert.

In response, environmental groups opposed to the plan, which could stretch from Desert Hot Springs to Hesperia, say they are bracing for the announcement, and at least one group is not ruling out a lawsuit.

David Nahai, the department's CEO and general manager, said May 3 that the agency could be filing its notice of intent, the first step in the environmental review, in a matter of weeks.

"We want to go out to the community with a very open mind about the best thing to do," Nahai said.

The LADWP maintains that the corridor is necessary to expand power-grid capacity in Southern California and bring power to Los Angeles. But environmental groups say the route will jeopardize unspoiled desert habitat.

"Surely, what we're hoping for is maximum public input," said Sid Silliman, chairman of the Sierra Club's San Geronio chapter.

April Sall, preserve manager for the Wildlands Conservancy, expressed disappointment that the LADWP plans to file a notice of intent without having met with the community.

"They haven't consulted with anyone outside of their closed doors," she said. "If they're going to file (a notice of intent), that's a pretty serious step. Again, they didn't engage the public."

Ruth Rieman, vice chairwoman of California Desert Coalition, said only one route is acceptable, a corridor along the 10 Freeway operated by Southern California Edison.

There is "no reason for us to gear up for any contest if they take the responsible action," she said.

Jim Harvey, who heads the Alliance for Responsible Energy Policy, said the group wants LADWP to abandon the corridor idea.

"Anybody who knows anything about this, knows it's a symbolic gesture; it's a formality," he said of the notice of intent. "We are prepared to litigate if LADWP wants to continue this push to destroy Southern California's environment."

He urged LADWP, instead, to focus on generating power within Los Angeles.

"If David Nahai is really as environmental as he likes to claim he is," Harvey said, "he would look to producing renewable energy inside L.A., just like San Francisco is doing right now."