



Green Path North project shelved

BY DEBRA GRUSZEC • THE DESERT SUN • MARCH 10, 2010

The Green Path North power line project has been shelved.

Open-space preservationists celebrated the announcement Wednesday by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power that it is terminating a three-year push to build new, electrical transmission lines across the desert and the San Bernardino mountains.

"It's an exciting day," April Sall said as the chairwoman of California Desert Coalition waved letters of notice to terminate the memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management with tears in her eyes. "It's been a long, three-year effort involving hundreds and thousands of volunteer hours by people who found out about this plan after having experienced the Sawtooth Fire,"

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power had proposed seven potential routes for the project to carry geothermal, wind and solar energy through 80 miles of high-voltage towers and lines from Imperial County to Los Angeles and inland cities.

One route cut through Desert Hot Springs, and took a path along scenic Highway 62 and the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve through the Sawtooth Mountains, the unspoiled vistas of Pioneer Town and two flat-top mesas.

Conservationists and environmentalists fought vigorously against the north-south and east-west routes, saying the project would destroy pristine views and scenes that tourists and the movie industry cherish.

They claimed the desert tortoise would be endangered, as would the water sources of migratory birds and Bighorn Peninsular sheep.

Billboards were purchased to urge Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to scrap the plan. A postcard and e-mail campaign was also conducted. The threat of litigation hung in the balance.

David Myers, executive director of The Wildlands Conservancy based in Oak Glen, said the conservancy met with LADWP six weeks ago and was told of the decision to look at other renewable energy alternatives involving an existing transmission line that goes to Owens Dry Lake in the Owens Valley.

It's a preferred plan because the land is already disturbed, Sall said.

In a telephone interview early Wednesday, Myers said, "It's a grand experiment in democracy."

"The voices of over 60,000 people that sent letters, post cards and e-mails to the mayor has been heard," Myers said.

Desert Hot Springs City Manager Rick Daniels said this is great news for the city and the Coachella Valley.

The north-south route took up a large swath of industrial land that would otherwise be used for job creation and economic development," Daniels said.

The plan called for the lines to be plotted behind Mission Lakes Country Club, a resort community on the west side of Desert Hot Springs that is dotted with upscale homes and is an attractive investment area for second-home buyers, retirees and fulltime residents.

"It would have been a blemish on the visual landscape up on the mountains," Daniels said. "It would have absorbed a half-mile-wide swath of land that otherwise would have been used for economic development."

Desert Hot Springs Councilman Russell Betts, who attended the press conference, said a lot of people did a lot of heavy lifting over the years to make this happen.

"The power lines would have been visible in the hills," he said, and the entrance to Desert Hot Springs from Highway 62 would have been changed to involve a drive under high-power transmission lines.

The Coachella Valley Association of Government also did its part to oppose the plan. It passed a resolution objecting to the transmission line development in the valley.

"We're thrilled to hear the news," said Jack Meyers, whose new home view would have been

obstructed if the project cut through Desert Hot Springs. “Hopefully, this will be the end of it.”

Sall said she is encouraged by the direction Los Angeles is taking to consider renewable energy alternatives in the Owens Valley areas that have already been disturbed. “This was not a NIMBY protest effort,” Sall added. “It was a grassroots protest to show there is a more responsible way to do this project.”

It’s precedent setting, she said, and it showcases Los Angeles’ role in driving responsible land use policy when it comes to energy alternatives.

Freeman’s appointment as interim general manager also helped, she said, as he ran the department before and earned a reputation as an administrator who is environmental-friendly.

He’s “ forward-thinking,” she said. “He gets his boots on the ground on the land-use side.”



Morongo Valley resident Laura Scherrod holds a sign while demonstrating with the California Desert Coalition on Jan. 20, 2009, before a meeting of the Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative (RETI) held at Palm Desert City Hall. The coalition opposes the Green Path North. (Crystal Chatham Desert Sun file)