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Subject: Sunrise Powerlink

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I spent last Friday evening in a lecture room at the Anza-Borrego visitor center. The walls there are made of pale adobe-style bricks and the display cases that line them are filled with impressive ollas and photos of the native people of the area. Skins of several indigenous species robe the stairs of a corner devoted to education. It is a place that speaks of the desert that has been a backyard of sorts to me nearly all my life. It is a place of muted colors, pungent scents, watercolor skies, and unique and iconic animals. Standing in the Anza-Borrego park, one sees the rugged lines of purple mountains dotted with soft green underbrush. The sounds of cawing crows and the soft fluting sounds of small birds call out from the prickly branches of the desert plants. On the air is the scent of sage and frail wildflowers. My backcountry has seen many changes in recent years. Fires turned the mountains black and charred the trees and undergrowth of our dry forests. A casino draws traffic to an area once traveled by the first people of California. And now, another change threatens one of the few pristine areas left to San Diego county. The Sunrise Powerlink project proposes to string a series of shining, metal towers through the fragile desert and over the hills into the peaceful Santa Ysabel valley. The project promises energy efficient power at a cost-effective price. However, Bill Powers, who has devoted years to studying the projects of both Sempra and SDG&E, insists that the Imperial County Solar Plant that SDG&E plans to use will not be functional until 2010, and possibly not until 2015. If so, what renewable energy source does the power company plan to use in the meantime? Some believe that the Imperial County's renewable energy sources are not even the intended power source, but rather the nearby natural-gas-fired plant built by Sempra Energy in nearby Mexico. Though SDG&E maintains that this claim is preposterous and further insists that the Mexico plant is as clean as any in California, the proximity of the two sources of energy casts suspicions on the power mogul's intent. I spent the last year and a half living in Jaco, Costa Rica, a town that exemplifies the influence big business can have on a place that needs money and lacks the checks, balances, and public voice that keep our governments relatively honest. I am always reluctant to believe in the environmental soundness of business projects located in other countries; if all the equipment and standards met in the Mexico plant are equivalents of those used in California, why bother having a plant in Mexico? With this in mind, why would the power company be interested in laying the foundation for a system of power lines that could potentially connect with our neighbor to the south? In order for me to acquiesce to the building of such a blight on the gorgeous mountains and deserts of San Diego County, I have to believe we have no alternative. However, even SDG&E reluctantly admits that it could meet the California standards for renewable energy without the proposed power line project. We are further proposing to combat our energy problems by expanding our energy potential, rather than combating our energy use. During my time in Costa Rica, I survived the muggy tropical climate with only three fans and one

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window. There was no air-conditioning I could leave running and no swamp cooler to stick in the window. Proponents of the power lines ensure that Californians could have all their power luxuries if the towers were put in place. Despite claims that the power company will exclusively use renewable energy sources, the power plan does nothing to curb the actual consumption of energy and instead encourages unbridled and indulgent power usage.

The towers, regardless of their final height will be undeniably visible as they gleam in our California sunshine. Visually, they will forever change the way our rural areas look. These are areas that have retained the same beauty they first offered pioneers, Native Americans, and those who had come to the area from Mexico. At sunset, Santa Ysabel is filled with a surreal glow that lengthens the shadows behind the humped backs of live oaks and grazing cows. The historic Santa Ysabel Mission sleeps in its glow. Imagining industrial towers parading in cold steel through this rugged train is to imagine a dystopia where big business and irresponsible power use destroy our connection with the past and with the natural world. The Sunrise Powerlink project is an unnecessary source of questionable energy that would irrevocably change California's backcountry for the worse.

-A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.
George Moore

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