

Becky Golden-Harrell

From: Cindy Buxton <iokuok2@hotmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 04, 2011 11:57 PM
To: catulewind@blm.gov
Attachments: McCain_Valley1.JPG; McCain_Valley_sill_sm.JPG

Iain Fisher, CPUC/Greg Thomsen, BLM,
c/o Dudek, 605 Third Street,
Encinitas, California 92024

Cedric Perry
BLM Project Manager California Desert District Office
22835 Calle San Juan de Los Lagos,
Moreno Valley, CA 92553
via: caocotillo@blm.gov

Angelina Havens
Imperial County Planning & Development Services
801 Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243
via: AngelinaHavens@co.imperial.ca.us

DEIR/EIS Comments:
Tule Wind Energy and East County Substation Projects
CASE FILE NUMBERS: CACA49698, CACA51625

Dear Mr. Thomsen and Mr. Fisher:

I was asked to provide comments on the above project by the San Diego Sierra Club. There has been some disagreement between the San Diego Chapter of the Sierra Club and the National Executive Board. The Executive Board requested in January that Sierra Club members not make visual comments on energy projects. About five minutes ago however the Executive Board of the National Sierra Clubs issued a statement reversing its position on the proposed Sunrise Powerlink.

I think it would be an understatement to say that by far and large the members in San Diego that I've communicated with find this requested project to be unreasonable and contrary to the 100 year legacy of this organization.

I drove the length of McCain Valley about a month ago. It was breathtaking. I went to the overlook and visitor information board and then to the far camp ground and about a mile past that. See attached photos.

I do not understand how these impacts can legally be allowed. How can you place wind mills near two camp grounds? The first camp ground will be closely impacted. Are you planning to close the camp grounds? They are there for quiet camping pleasure of the public. I do not see how these could possibly be mitigated on site. Are you going to build new ones somewhere else?

There are some rock formations looking to the south west from the main road near the overlook spur. They will be compromised by surrounding infrastructure. The overlook contained numerous vistas that I do not see how they will be able to mitigate adequately. What is now unspoiled in all directions will not be.

What is the cost of this land for this project?

What will the BLM use this money for?

What is the cost benefit of the land if they do nothing?

Why does the government lease land so cheaply when so much is given away that can not be returned?

I do not think the mitigation effort is adequate compared to the unique resource that is being taken. Iberdrola claims there are no critical species or impacts. I would disagree. The complex high desert chaparral and the wind carved rock formations are highly unique and well treasured landscapes by local San Diegans.

It is hard to imagine the suggested project is a serious suggestion. On the one hand there is a tremendous effort to preserve and protect whole ecosystems in this nation underway by the current administration. These places, including McCain Valley are the spiritual backbone of the American Experience.

The National Environmental Protection Act lays down a detailed process for public communication and disclosure of these projects. In the past five years of closely monitoring the Sunrise Powerlink to this point of commenting on the Tule Wind Project and some of the other connected actions and projects proposed, this EIS is one of the best prepared I've seen. I do hope I meet the person who wrote it in the communications and open houses that are likely to follow. My colleagues, who are far more knowledgeable and skilled in reviewing these, undoubtedly may find many additional details. However a lay person with some dedication can review this and gather a serious sense of the far reaching impacts and implications of this project without requiring an environmental science or law degree to do so. I appreciate a professional effort. This is still a very complicated, convoluted issue. The relationship of Tule Wind to the many other proposals as well as the initial Sunrise Powerlink took two hundred pages even in your document. I will not be able to filter it all.

As I did for the Ocotillo scoping letter, I would like to reference the comments by Donna Tisdale and Edie Harmon on this project and all connected actions, the several wind and solar projects and transmission line projects. As I mentioned in that letter, I've known Edie over a decade and Donna for at least half of one. Both of these women have spent thousands of hours, sacrificing time and life spent more comfortably in any number of ways, documenting the desert and high chaparral regions of our county, San Diego and Imperial County to be clearer. Edie Harmon spent so much time in the Sierra Club office with her late husband patiently at her side, that they bought him a rocking chair and put a brass plack on it labeled "The Harmon Chair". It is a one of its kind "trophy" of appreciation to our member that probably knows more about desert issues, the BLM, and NEPA processes, in this area than anyone else.

I tell you these things now, in a federal comment period to substantiate the expertise and regard we have in the San Diego Chapter for the efforts of these two women to preserve our desert lands and communities and cultures, both human and otherwise, for the generations to come. I can only hope my own passion for the Cleveland National Forest regions of this area could evolve to mirror the professional example they have created. I could not presume to replicate the expertise they bring to this forum nor do I know off hand who could.

I know of no reason why the points made in Donna's letter would not be fully endorsed by the collective goals of the San Diego Sierra Club and wish to incorporate her points as largely supported by the people in our local chapter if not the chapter itself.

I've been reviewing portions of the larger connected action, the Sunrise Powerlink, for five years now, though my region of greater expertise is in the Cleveland National Forest. I have numerous photos and video online on www.youtube.com under the channel "iokuok2". I am not paid, rarely if ever reimbursed, not on a grant, nor have other additional relationships to the land, that I'm aware of, in this project other than my own experience of going there. My ability to gather a plethora of facts, especially at random, especially if provided auditorily is mediocre at best. However my ability, once at hand, to synthesize, identify, predict the probable patterns and implications from non-sequitor and abstract sources of information is tested well above the upper 90 percentile and one that I don't get to exercise for daily routine efforts.

This project is anything but routine.

Based upon some of this I would predict that even though there has been a good effort on this EIS, perhaps an exceptional one, we will be surprised with more connected actions in the future. The one that seems most likely comes from AB 2514 that suggests that with a large number of windmills there will be some form of reservoir and pump-storage to store and "smooth out" the energy produced by wind power.

What projects for pump storage and other energy storage are being planned to support the complex of wind farms in the area?

Have locations such as Barret Lake and Lake Morena been suggested?

When were locations for energy storage first suggested?

When was Tule Wind in McCain Valley first suggested?

What is the alternative?

Please explain what type of generation is placed into the grid, DC or AC? Does Sunrise carry more than one?

Please explain why the one chosen was chosen. Presumably wind generation is initially DC? So why that would not be kept in DC form for as long as possible to reduce the energy loss from transmission and then converted when AC is needed?

There are questions being asked and answered way out of sequence in these energy issues. The most obvious is "Is it needed at all?"

What are the specific criteria create the urgency for this project. What are the specific criteria that require the project to be where it is instead of on an area with less pristine qualities.

We have a 500 kV power line with an in specific future of 1000kv already approved, albeit in litigation, and wind farms proposed that if brought to full fruition will convert lands managed from rural in character, to lands seriously under consideration for Federal Wilderness projection for the size of an equilateral triangle 20 miles on a side, or 173 square miles, or 110,720 acres of impact. This doesn't include the Ocotillo Projects nor the projects in Mexico that are up to three times that.

This began as what shrinks in hindsight, as a 500kv line through Anza Borrego desert to ensure energy reliability in this region 2005. It progressed to a national prototype by some to create "green" energy and move away from fossil fuels that would remedy global warming.

However the latter has never been officially defined, nor confirmed, nor nationally supported as the essential movement. In fact the Bakken in Montana are currently being extracted in accelerated fashion to produce enough oil to double our national oil reserves.

Given that it is difficult to justify supporting a project that basically removes an enormous section of gorgeous unspoiled natural beauty, as well as uprooting houses, homes, cultures, and lives, the lives of humans, as well as the lives of animals and plants, whole unspoiled systems, if part of the country is expanding the status quo in oil. It would not seem that the national policy is consistently fearful of global warming or fully integrated and mobilized, mentally or otherwise, into a solution.

Please explain what is the main driving force that legitimizes this project?

To what degree is this complex of projects to assist Mexico and the relationship we have with them? What is the main goal for that relationship inside of the scope of these projects?

From a look at the EIS in general I would conclude that the categories covered indicate very serious impacts in all of them. The BLM has done their job for the EIS in this way. These are so critical and serious that until now, given their level of impact, I do not believe this project would have had a chance of approval. Not even a casual outdoor enthusiast remotely familiar with environmental protection would have dreamed that a private corporation could claim this land for industrial development for pennies on the dollar for their profit.

I would conclude that this is not a normal situation and does not operate under a normal bell curve of NEPA approval. The EIS is NEPA required, but not “NEPA considered” in the capacity that it always has been before. Never before could someone suggest to undo a management class all the way to category IV along with two public campgrounds, a functioning resolution for off roaders and dirt bikes and a wildlife management area well regarded by hunters, hikers, and spelunkers. That this could be rationalized all the way to plausible is far and away off the bell curve.

I would like to incorporate by reference my comments to the Ocotillo scoping project. I outlined many concerns for reasons outside of environmental ones that I believe are catching the attention of the general public enough that they should warrant concern and be researched.

The EIS describes several issues that we would agree are issues for this project. Some of the following were identified by Donna Tisdale in an earlier letter:

“For the record, this is a partial list of our major concerns with the proposed project and the overall rush to industrialize our scenic and sensitive public lands --that should be protected--and impacted low-income rural communities:

} Allowing commercial industrial uses on lands zoned as Limited Use by scuttling that zoning meant to protect significant and sensitive resources and converting those lands and resources to large-scale destructive industrial uses.

} Lack of need for this and remote projects that require new extensive, expensive and destructive transmission infrastructure at the expense of US taxpayers, utility rate payers, public lands and critical resources.

} The intermittent and unreliable nature of wind energy that requires an average 70-90% in backup generation.

} What is the designated load follower / backup source?

} How many connections to IV Substation is too many? What is the limit?

} Industry misrepresentations of Green House Gas benefits from industrial wind energy proponents should be challenged.

} In the UK, a wind energy company lost a truth in advertising challenge, their GHG reduction claims were proven to be improperly based on out-dated data related to older more polluting power plants that had already been closed or retrofitted.

} Scale and scope of project and proximity to Anza Borrego Desert State Park, other sensitive public lands and resources,

(and I add proximity to the Cleveland National Forest, their visual references these at over ten miles when in fact they are 3-5 miles away.)

} Adverse and cumulative impacts to the rural low-income community of Ocotillo, and other residential areas. (I would add to Jacumba, and Boulevard, and Lake Morena, and Campo)

} Adverse impacts to road quality from massive overweight construction equipment/cranes and project equipment transportation to community / public roads that have not received much if any significant repair within memory.

} Cumulative air quality impacts from traffic related to multiple industrial scale mining and energy projects on BLM lands in the area in addition to I-8 traffic impacts.

} Environmental Justice issues / disproportionate number of projects are concentrated in Western Imperial County and Eastern San Diego County. Noise and air pollution count.

*} Significant cumulative impacts to a variety of resources from numerous massive wind, solar, and transmission infrastructure projects to the same geographic area, resources, and low-income rural communities. Both BLM and Imperial County should have a complete list, similar to that used in the joint PUB/BLM DEIR/EIS for Tule Wind, ECO Substation and Energia Sierra Juarez at Figure F-1 & F-2:
http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/dudek/ecosub/Draft_EIR/F_Cumulative.pdf*

} Impacts to designated critical and occupied habitat and wildlife corridors for the endangered Peninsular Bighorn Sheep. (I would add the migrating deer from the Lagunas especially during snowfall)

} Impacts to bird and bat populations including Golden Eagles and other raptors through direct impacts with blades, towers, transmission lines, and loss of forage and prey.

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} Golden Eagles have a range of 100 miles and more. The Tule Wind DEIR/EIS top CEQA alternative is NO Project. Based on Class I impacts to Air Quality, Noise, Biological Resources, Visual Character, Fire and Fuels, and Cultural Resources.

} Impacts to Flat Tailed Horned Lizards, desert tortoises, other endangered and sensitive wildlife and unfragmented habitat. (I would add to water resources and riparian areas)

} Impacts to a significant known concentration of Native American cultural resources, including village and camp sites, graves, ceremonial sites, Traditional Cultural Properties including Areas of Traditional Cultural Concern, Sacred Geography, and Areas of Potential Effect.

} Need for real and timely tribal consultations in full compliance with NHPA and other applicable laws and regulations

} Adverse health effects to people, pets, and wildlife from low frequency noise and infrasound , shadow flicker, and exposure to Valley Fever through newly disturbed desert soils.

} Adverse impacts to ground dwelling species from vibrations traveling through turbine shafts into the ground, construction of new roads and fragmentation of habitat.

} Conversion of public open space and recreational use (loss of use) to private commercial / industrial use in an area not zoned or compatible for such use.

(I would add the prohibitory impact to two campgrounds, wildlife management area, and spectacular views. The recreational impacts will create extra pressure upon what is left)

} Adverse impacts to property values from loss of premium open desert views and quality of life.

} Significant impacts to Visual Resources and wilderness experience in the adjacent Jacumba Mountain Wilderness Areas, Table Mountain Wilderness Study Area, Coyote Mountain Wilderness and ACEC, Sin

Number Wilderness, Carrizo Canyon Wilderness, Carrizo Gorge Wilderness, Sombrero Peak Wilderness, and the Cleveland National Forest, La Posta Canyon , and Antoine Canyon, Limited Use Areas where travel is currently restricted to open routes and the camp sites and trails within all the areas named above.

} Impacts to historic Desert View Tower and Mountain Springs Park

} Conversion of rural visual resources/character to visually intrusive industrial energy park

} Fragmentation of large natural habitats, wildlife landscapes, and currently stable desert soils and vegetation.

} Loss of ambient quiet and remoteness from the urban environment.

} Loss of Dark Sky for scientific study and recreational use and enjoyment.

} Interference with aviation radar, homeland security activities, military aviation routes of travel.

} Interference with cell signals, radio communications, medical devices

} Air quality impacts and introduction of fire ignition sources in underserved rural area.

} Impacts to emergency Services, increased fire insurance rates, waste disposal for non-recyclable composite blades and other turbine parts that have a high rate of failure.

} Need for Property Value Protection Agreements for private property owners within a 5-mile radius of each turbine, along with pre-construction ambient sound testing with A and C weighting

} Need to prevent on-site stockpiling of discarded blades and turbine parts through permit

} Impacts to water quality and quantity, from contamination and overdraft in the federally designated Ocotillo Coyote Wells Sole Source Aquifer/ already in state of overdraft ,

(would add the ground water near the Manzanita Reservation and Jacumba, Boulevard, and Buckman Springs area, and the indication that the developers may be thinking of buying ground water from the Lagunas and Cuyamacas.

} Turbines should be constructed with catch basins at base to prevent oil leaks from entering soil and groundwater.

} Increased soil erosion and air borne dust and pathogens.

} Need for local mitigation. Do not allow out of the area mitigation for any impacted species--like BLM allowed for Bighorn Sheep impacted by the Sunrise Powerlink.

} All environmental surveys, mitigation proposals, contracted water sources, and turbine models must be provided for public review and comment prior to project approval.

The Federal Land Policy Management Act directs that:

the public lands be managed in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archeological values; that, where appropriate, will preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition; that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals; and that will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use.

FLMPA further requires agencies that are considering applications for rights-of-way to limit to the extent feasible the natural resource damage of the proposed project. 43

U.S.C. § 1765. FLPMA mandates that “[e]ach right-of-way shall be limited to the ground which the Secretary concerned determines [. . .] will do no unnecessary damage to the environment.” 43

U.S.C. § 1764. FLPMA also requires that “[e]ach right-of-way shall contain . . . terms and conditions which will . . . minimize damage to scenic and esthetic values and fish and wildlife habitat and otherwise protect the environment.” 43 U.S.C. § 1765. These requirements are strictly enforced and cannot be easily counterbalanced by project proponents’ claims of

inconvenience or cost. *Trout Unlimited v. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture*, 320 F.Supp.2d 1090, 1108

This is the standard that should be enforced. From the EIS however there is glaring rationalization and blatant presumption of entitlement that Environmental issues can be ignored. The level of impact from this project can not be mitigated. When you have a whole system that is not being acted upon by outside pressure, then you develop it, there is no way to rationalize its unspoiled character any more.

I understand that the content of the EIS does not necessarily reflect “a proceed” or “don’t proceed” opinion of either the BLM or the person that wrote the EIS on behalf of the BLM, but the task of following through with NEPA public disclosures in the course of performing their job. It clearly demonstrates significant changes that the lay person can follow, as a NEPA document is supposed to disclose, that will occur if that project goes through.

As I also stated in my Ocotillo comments, from review of the Tule Project it is obvious that this is totally contrary to any effort, project, siting, scoping, or legal intention that the public could reasonably perceive as the general intention or direction that the BLM has taken in that area in the past. In short, it is inconceivable that this project is consistent with NEPA or FLMA criteria. It basically suggests radical alteration of McCain Valley from an unspoiled, substantially environmentally and historically significant region, by all NEPA criteria, to an industrialized one.

Any reasonable person, regardless of their personal opinion or relationship to the land would know the general endeavors of the Sierra Club to include protecting and preserving places such as that one even if they did not necessarily agree with the Sierra Club environmental explicatives. For now I would like to assume this much is reasonably true. Also, it is reasonable to assume that regardless of their opinion on the genuine existence of global warming, by as a matter of common knowledge, a member of the public would regard the general endeavors of the Sierra Club to likely include dedicated and agile pursuit of a resolution to global warming to be a likely activity of that organization, based upon a conscience decision by that organization that the potential threat of global warming is too serious to ignore and hence requires considerable preventative action.

The area surrounding Ocotillo for the Ocotillo Express project is enormous. It is exposed in the wide open escarpment from the mountain ranges on the west to the desert floor below. This would impact the desert in every NEPA categorical area of concern. In the updated Federal Land Management policy, there is expanded emphasis on regarding whole ecological systems when reviewing the impact of a project. These wind farms, roads, building, maintenance, water requirements, air, create direct and indirect impacts to habitat, human activities, and archeological resources totally altering the dynamics of an ecosystem. The land as an unspoiled ecological system is subject to be converted to an industrial complex. In spite of the presumed fantasy of the alterators to the land classification for areas of critical concern, these two worlds do not coincide or co-locate with integrity and to this author that ability has never been reasonable established with any consistent integrity. As the existing level 3 designation, presumably it is illegal to convert it to the other without serious extenuating circumstances. As Donna noted this land has been designated differently for perpetuity. This project is in blatant conflict with all planning and consideration up to this point.

The Tule wind project adds to a chain of proposed projects connected and initiated by the proposed Sunrise Powerlink Transmission line project. When that project began, according to NEPA all connected actions were supposed to have been disclosed. Clearly they were not. It doesn’t take more than the studious member of the public to realize that neither of these projects would come close to legal fruition in normal times. So the only conclusion that can be reasonably extrapolated from the connected experience is that since they are not remotely legal or in keeping with the regular goals of managing public lands that the orchestrators of this project as well

as the others either perceive, though never clearly specified in their EIS, that these are NOT normal times; or that they somehow perceive themselves entitled or in a privileged class outside of the laws for the rest of us..

We have to conclude that the ramifications of even proposing this project is serious and should be very carefully considered not only for environmental reasons but under the umbrella of other public laws as well. When does our country normally allow for exceptions of this magnitude? After all the collective assortment of green projects now on the drawing board for this region, in areas that are unspoiled, not the already impacted agricultural lands as we are often told and promised they would be considering, now create a wind mill spinning barrier from the mountains to the border impacting all life forms, ecologies, and habitats, From the desert floor at Ocotillo to the Lagunas, to the Mexican border, and as it turns out, well into Mexico in the Sierra Juarez the character and dynamics of ecosystems are splintered and altered. Only in war time or in emergencies where life and property are severely threatened has our country stepped in to undo a hundred years of protecting the most fundamental environmental standards. The implications are sweeping.

I can extrapolate two actions though there may be others.

On the one hand the concerns over global warming are greater and far better known and elaborated to the government and to possibly top members of its designated stakeholder, the Sierra Club National. If this is true, consider that under the current scenario these connected projects make global warming worse. They are not a solution and they contribute to the problem. We, as Americans are no stranger to buckling down to adversity, making sacrifices to project our country. However this isn't protecting our country. If it is then this explanation is highly over-due in contrast to the life changing impact to lives already engaged in this process for five years. These projects add to CO2 and require considerable backup fossil fuel generation. Or as some are suggesting we create huge backup "batteries" in the form of pump storage. No connected action for pump storage has been disclosed. So for this general scenario I'm reluctant to believe in its implied merits to stem global warming. What one would view as logically tangent actions to this just doesn't exist. No action in town to reduce the impacts. No efficient upgrades of the existing infrastructure. No undergrounding of Direct Current where it makes the better sense to do so. In general any of the state CEQA mandates to choose the lesser of evil impacts, albeit more expensive ones, were skirted by moving the cumulative set of perceived projects largely to federal land where disclosure is required, action not necessarily but thanks to the Energy Act, consideration for connected actions is.

So alternatively consider that it is not about global warming but rather about money. Than the actions should include a thorough review of the balance sheets and investing habits of all connected players who propose these projects, their friends, and families, their strategies, and the public good at hand, as well as the management of green funds and their investors in the last decade. Is there a reasonable National interest? Could we be doing these things to ensure the safe delivery of the communist world into ours? We could not begin to speculate on the entitled intentions of investors or for legitimate National Security, but the BLM as managers of US Public land and resources must do so. This Ocotillo project and others like it open doors to land grabs, for pennies on the dollar to public owned resources. Does the public get the benefit? This is a question that must be answered and disclosed.

A decade ago the Sierra Club issued a request for information or FOIA on the closed door planning meetings of the contributions and intentions of the undisclosed members participating in the creation of the Energy Act of 2005. Ultimately they lost this challenge and the needs and intentions of the members of the groups participating were not disclosed. Some of these participants are commonly thought to represent the interests of other nations as well as our own. That may not be a strike against it but in light of a lack of transparency over the full and logical motives of this project and its connected action with the others since 2005 it is time to revisit the relationship of the Energy Act, the FERC corridors, and these projects. If we need an integrated resolution to global warming than one needs to begin with all of the actions and technologies well represented in the development of a coordinated plan. This one has been more the cat and mouse game of trying to acquire the

simplest explanations in timely fashion. We ask that the BLM continue to be the stewards of our lands and ensure that this review process is carried out thoroughly, transparently for the ultimate public collective good.

The time is come and overdue for the transparency of disclosures around these projects. If we are going to be successful in alleviating global warming, democracy will have to be placed first.

Last summer I received an invitation to tour the proposed Tule Wind Project. The company liaison very professionally answered my questions and set up a tour. However later we would learn that local members of the community of Boulevard were not allowed to go. When I objected to a brand new national Sierra Club Policy that prohibited local chapter member comments on energy projects, I was suddenly removed from the tour; not by Tule Wind but by the Sierra club. I had even provided some potential sites much closer to town in legitimate spirit of participating objectively. Somewhere in that shuffle I learned, though I have not substantiated, that the parent company Iberdrola Renewables, from Spain is invested, to what degree was not mentioned, from a requested FOIA, in by our former vice president Dick Cheney. When we juxtapose this with the initial portions of the pattern where the Energy Act of 2005 with Cheney at the helm was not allowing the Sierra Club access to the details of Energy Act meetings and participants, it should raise some questions as to how the National Sierra Club became so protective enough in the people that litigated out their access to information , to now prevent my participation on a tour?

Please add my name and contact information to this project serve list for future notification. 619 934-0323.

Sincerely,
Cynthia M. Buxton

CoChair of the Forest Committee of the San Diego Chapter of the Sierra Club.
Member of POC, ECCAC/ SD River Park Foundation
Adoptive Parent of the Proposed Eagle Peak Wilderness

Imperial Beach, Ca. 91932

If you believe in democracy, trust it in a crisis.

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