

August 8, 2009

Mr. Jensen Uchida
California Public Utilities Commission
Energy Division
Area 4-A
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102-3214

Re: **Docket # A08-05-039 "San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Transmission Project**

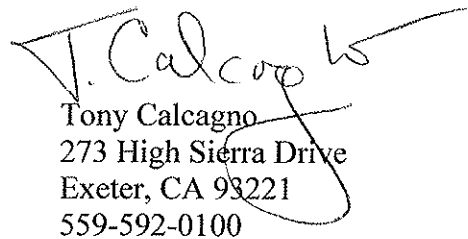
Recent Newspaper Articles

Dear Mr. Uchida,

Here are a few of the newspaper articles that were written after the July 23, 2009 public comment on the DEIR at the Visalia Convention.

I thought these would be good for you to have and read. I know that more articles were written but the thought to send them your way only just occurred to me so I do not have the others to send.

Kind Regards,


Tony Calcagno
273 High Sierra Drive
Exeter, CA 93221
559-592-0100



July 24, 2009

Valley residents blast Edison's second power-line route

Farmers, experts across region bemoan loss of prime ag land

BY GERALD CARROLL

gcarroll@visalia.gannett.com

Three generations of the Hengst family from Woodlake don't want to see the end of a five-generation family farm.

"Do not put the poles through the 'Valley of the Sun' [Hengst Farms]," said 13-year-old Foster Hengst, referring to Southern California Edison's plans to build a new, high-capacity power-line route from its Big Creek transmission line northeast of Woodlake to the main power connection in Visalia.

Hengst's comments came Thursday night at a hearing on the first draft of an environmental impact report for the project a public-comment session attended by more than 700 people at the Visalia Convention Center.

Edison has for two years been trying to upgrade its electrical power connection between its Big Creek main power line in the Sierra foothills and Visalia, citing a desperate need to modernize Visalia's century-old system.

However, the new lines must cross over prime farmland, historic grounds or sensitive vernal pools, and they use huge 120- to 160-foot towers.

Property owners near the proposed paths of the new line have forcefully resisted, including those in attendance Thursday.

The focus was on a route favored by the California Public Utilities Commission, or PUC, which appeared to have less impact on the environment than Edison's preferred choice. The PUC's preferred route runs north of Woodlake, through Elderwood.

Edison's first choice, covering 181 $\frac{1}{2}$ —2 miles, runs farther south and slices through Lemon Cove, Exeter and Farmersville on the way to Visalia.

The PUC will choose one of three proposed routes as soon as the EIR is finalized, said consultant Doug Cover, who coordinated the hearing.

"We have 50 speaking cards here, and we will try and give everyone a chance to comment," Cover said. "Written comments will carry equal weight."

Deadline for public comment is July 31.

Foster's grandfather, Bob Hengst, was blunt in his assessment of the PUC's suggested route, which skirts Woodlake to the north but cuts through the community of Elderwood and other valuable agricultural properties, he said.

"The devil himself could not have selected a more devastating path through the Hengst property,"

Bob Hengst said.

Bob Hengst said that irreplaceable infrastructure, such as a so-called wagon well that irrigates 230 acres, is in the path of the power lines and targeted for demolition. A wagon well has a central well with labor-intensive conduits extending out like the spokes of a wheel and can irrigate a large area.

"Wagon wells can't be built for any price," Bob Hengst said, as new worker safety rules now outlaw such wells.

David Hengst, Bob's son and Foster's dad, said the route effectively wipes out the otherwise successful Hengst fruit-farming business, where oranges, plums and pomegranates have been grown and harvested since the early 1900s.

"At \$200,000 an acre, we lose \$23 million in property value alone if these lines go in," said David Hengst. "Counting loss of prime farmland, another \$27 million in future income, and jobs, will disappear. It's a \$50 million loss and effectively ends Hengst Farms as a business."

Far-reaching effects

George McEwen, whose 60 acres of orange groves near Exeter could be clear-cut if the first proposal, Edison's preferred option, were to be implemented, said that the Hengsts' problems dwarf his own.

"It's hard to believe," said McEwen, whose 250-member organization, Protect Agriculture, Communities and the Environment, or PACE, has fought Edison on the power-line route for two years. "Clearly, nobody is out of the woods."

Lawona Icho Jasso of Selma, whose father, Felix Icho, was one of the patriarchs of the Wukchumni tribe buried near the path of Edison's preferred route, was one of an estimated 700 attendees who turned out for the hearing.

"The environmental [impact] report has to consider history and religious significance of the land," Jasso said. "That's why we're here."

Bob Blakely, director of industry relations for California Citrus Mutual, an insurance and support organization for Central Valley growers, stressed that the EIR process is far from complete.

"A lot can happen between now and when the EIR is final," said Blakely, who agreed with most attendees that a third alternative route that would run east of Oroshi and feed into the Visalia line, is the alternative that does the least damage to agriculture.

"The argument against that route is a vernal-pools area that can easily be mitigated," Blakely said.

A final decision on which route the PUC chooses for Edison will be made later in the fall, officials say.

Additional Facts

Farm, crop losses

Loss of farmland and walnut acreage with three of Southern California Edison's power-line pathway proposals for east Tulare County:

- Preferred route (from Lemon Cove through Exeter, Farmersville and into Visalia): 31.1 acres of farmland, 29 acres of walnuts.
- Alternative 2 (north of Woodlake into Visalia): 23.9 acres of farmland, 12 acres of walnuts.

Comment Letter I98

- Alternative 3 (east of Oroshi into Visalia): 16.7 acres of farmland, 12 acres of walnuts.
(Note: Area property owners and farmers indicate a much larger loss of farmland with all three proposals.)
Source: Southern California Edison and the California PUC

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SCE Line Issue Sparks Loud Outcry

By Miles Shuper

A modified Alternative Route 3 simply makes good sense as the best site for Southern California Edison's controversial high voltage transmission line, the state Public Utilities Commission was loudly told during a public meeting on a draft Environmental Impact Report of the project.

Formation of a grassroots citizens' advisory committee to work with the PUC and its consultants to come up with a route with the least environmental, economic and social impacts was among the suggestions offered at



The SCE Rector substation in southeast Visalia is the destination of the power lines the power company wants to bring into the county.

the session attended by about 700 persons.

There was no doubt that those

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attending were adamant that Alternative Route 3 with modifications allowing the bypass of sensitive vernal pools, was the favored route. That route, through the Stone Corral Ecological Reserve, should be the top choice because it would be easy to mitigate, foes say. Route 3 locally is referred to as the Stokes Mountain route and portions of an existing power line run through the area.

That section is much better than Route 2 which the PUC earlier this year tabbed as the top choice. It runs north of Woodlake and Elderwood and bisects the Valley of the Sun, a historically significant agriculturally productive and cattle raising area. The Valley of the Sun was the scene of a huge festival attended by an estimated 10,000 persons in 1916 and the largest outdoor event west of the Mississippi.

The PUC's decision to put Route 2 at the top of the list was a victory of sorts for those who opposed Edison's favored Route 1, an 18-mile path through Lemon Cove, Exeter and Farmersville and into the Rector Substation in Visalia.

But members of PACE (Protect Agriculture, Communities and the Environment) successfully lobbied hard and strong against Route 1, and now are fighting just as hard to convince the PUC to select their authored modified Route 3. As anticipated, the PUC selection of Route 2 re-energized Elderwood and Woodlake property owners and residents who united when earlier hearings on all the routes were held. Route 2 opponents claim Route 3 could use existing rights of way for current lines which could be upgraded and have less overall impact.

James Gordon of Lemon Cove said, "We can recycle our cans and bottles. Why not recycle transmission lines?"

Several speakers said Edison's current transmission lines along Route 3 will have to be upgraded in the future, so it only makes sense to do it now.

Patricia Stevers, executive director of the Tulare County Farm Bureau, one of more than three dozen speakers at the Visalia Convention Center meeting last week, cited the number of area citizens and property owners at the meeting as an indication of how critical the final SCE selection is. She urged the formation of what she termed as "a community-based advisory" panel to work with the PUC, its staff, consultants and others. "Let us be a part of that decision," she said.

The draft EIR drew considerable criticism for its alleged shortcomings on the actual financial impact on farmland, water issues including wells,

pumps, irrigation systems and ground water impacts, health concerns, safety as well as land values.

According to the draft EIR, only 16.7 acres of farmland and 12 acres of walnuts would be lost in Route 3, while Route 2, the current choice, would mean the loss of 23.9 acres of farmland and 12 acres of walnuts. Edison's first choice, Route 1 - through Lemon Cove, Exeter, Farmersville and with a Highway 198 frontage route - would take 31.1 acres of farmland and 29 acres of walnuts out of production.

When the more than two-hour session ended around 9:30 p.m., it was clear dissatisfaction was the overwhelming consensus.

Bob Hengst, the eldest of three generations of Hengst to speak that night, made it clear that Route 2 should not be the PUC choice. "The devil himself could not have selected a more devastating path" through the family property.

And his explanation of the impact the tower and lines will have on the irrigation and wells was typical of concerns expressed by almost all the speakers. Drilling a productive well is always a gamble and to put wells out of service because they are in the path of power lines is just too big of a mistake.

Hengst outlined how a wagon-wheel well on family property, the source of irrigation for 230 acres in the path of the power line, would have to be abandoned if the lines were built.

Current safety regulations basically prohibit new wagon-wheel wells with a central vertical shaft and horizontal spokes with conduits or lines reaching out to other ground water sources, which greatly increase water production from one major well.

"Such wells," Hengst explained, are things of the past and to lose a productive one would be devastating.

David Hengst, Bob's son, said Route 2 would essentially wipe out much of the family's productive citrus, plum, pomegranate and other crop acreage which have been farmed for decades. At \$200,000 an acre in production and land value, the family would lose \$23 million in value and another \$27 million in future income and job losses, for an overall total loss of about \$50 million, essentially putting an end to the family business.

Bob Blakely, director of industry relations for California Citrus Mutual, called the draft EIR lacking on many fronts but said it is clear that Route 3, with the mitigation of avoiding the vernal pools area, is clearly the best choice.

No date for release of a final EIR report has been set but it is likely at least several months away, according to those close to the issue.



THE FOOTHILLS

Sun-Gazette

Serving the foothill communities of Exeter, Farmersville, Ivanhoe, Lemon Cove, Lindsay, Plainview, Strathmore, Three Rivers and Woodlake.

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 2009

A SAFE NIGHT

Exeter PD holds 4th annual Night Out against crime Aug. 4.

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NO. 1 KILLER

Drowning is the No. 1 cause of death in Sequoia Nat'l Park.

CITY
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In This Issue

STILL IN THE RACE

Public pressures CPUC to 'Go to Rte 3'

Locals add to Draft EIR, tell CPUC to choose Route #3 of SoCal Edison powerline project

By Mo Montgomery

SUN-GAZETTE

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) was not ready for the public response they received at the Draft EIR (Draft Environmental Impact) Hearing for the San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Project last Thursday night in Visalia. After nearly doubling the size of

the room and having to add more chairs as people continued to flood in, representatives from the CPUC and its consulting firm announced they had received more than 50 comments cards.

No one can deny the public outcry the project has purposed, but this meeting between parties was different. Those who spoke had examined the Draft EIR thoroughly and were ready to share their knowledge and expertise on various items. From water wells to geological issues, division of parcels to focused bio-

logical surveys, residents from various communities spoke from different sides of the lines, but ultimately said the same thing, "Go to route #3."

The project proposes to build high-voltage power lines from its hydro-electric facilities in the Sierras to its Rector Substation southeast of Visalia. Edison's Proposed Route, or Route 1, would result in permanent removal of 31.1 acres of farmland (e.g., 16.1 acres of Prime Farmland, 0.7 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 14.3 acres

of Unique Farmland) between Lemon-cove and Visalia and the towers would cut through the middle of the City of Farmersville's proposed regional shopping center just south of Highway 198. The project would also result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses in areas where height restrictions of crops within the right of way would cause walnut orchards to become unproductive as well as alterations to elements of the

"I don't know how one could take away so much from farmers and then later charge those farmers for that power when they have given up so much already."

- JAMES JORDAN, farmer

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ROUTE 3:

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Big Creek Hydroelectric System Historic District. While this is a similar story on other routes in the Draft EIR, the severity lessons as the paths head north. The Draft EIR seemed in favor of Alternative Route 2 which heads north on current SCE right-of-way, the crosses through the foothills near Elderwood, just north of Woodlake to the Big Creek 3-Springville transmission line.

Many residents from the Elderwood area along Route 2 spoke for the first time in years after being alerted by the Draft EIR findings. David and Linda Hengst spoke along with their son Foster and David's father Bob. Their family stands to lose millions if the lines are permitted to go through their farms. Linda said their daughter has property near the SCE Rector Substation in Visalia and has not been able to sell their property because she was told the power lines depleted the land's worth.

Bob Hengst said that the power lines would require the moving of a pivotal well on their property.

"Without this well, our land will revert to dry land," said Hengst.

Water wells were one of the top discussion points of the evening as farmers, well drillers and various citrus association representatives spoke of the severity of having to move any well.

"Water levels are dropping and there is no guarantee we'd find water whether we moved a well 10 feet or 1,000 feet," said citrus grower Eric Meling.

Randy Redfield, an olive farmer in Elderwood said he drilled 24 times before he found water and that finding water in that area is growing difficult. Many farmers were also concerned about the construction process, the moving of wind machines and the loss of more agriculture.

"I don't know how one could take away so much from farmers and then later charge those farmers for that power when they have given up so much already," said farmer James Jordan.

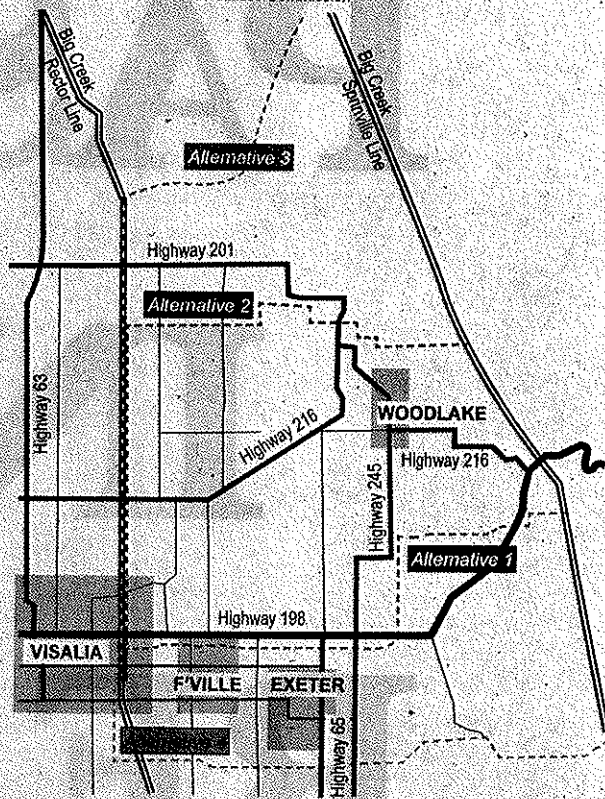
At the end of every person's comments, route #3 was mentioned. While the Draft EIR stated that the vernal pools along route #3 in the Stone Corral Ecological Reserve could not be mitigated, many of the public disagreed.

George McEwen, a Lemoncove citrus grower and president of the group known as PACE (Protect Agriculture Communities Environment), said that various members of the group and its hired consultant, Lon House, met with the California Department of Fish and Game to discuss the issue. He

San Joaquin Valley Cross Transmission Loop

SOURCE: California Public Utilities Commission

Comment Letter 198



be mitigated.

Tulare County District 4 Supervisor Steve Wortley echoed this statement.

"The idea that this area cannot be mitigated is conjecture and not based on the facts," said Wortley. He added that there is an existing line that goes through the preserve now and that this line of 38 towers could be replaced with as little as eight new towers.

Greg Kirkpatrick, who conducted various focused biological surveys of the vernal pools in that area in the 1990s, also said the pools could be mitigated.

"There is no critical habitat on route #3 outside the Stone Corral area and the lines could be rerouted to where certain species are not present," said Kirkpatrick.

Those representing other public agencies also spoke.

"We share all the concerns that have been echoed tonight," said Tulare County Farm Bureau Executive Director Tricia Stever. "We'll submit more extensive comments along with those from the California Farm Bureau. We just ask that you let us be apart of this process no matter what route you choose."

Farmersville City Councilman Paul Boyer represented Farmersville residents pushing for the project to be moved to route #3.

The city has plans for a regional shopping center and an industrial park that will fall through if the Proposed Route is chosen.

"If you look at our online as a

this is the only place," said Boyer. "Twenty percent of our city is unemployed and most are farm workers. We need to have that tax base."

All comments from the evening as well as written comments will be added to the Final EIR, said to be published next month.

Leading the charge against SCE's proposed power line path is a group of local residents known as PACE. Formed initially to oppose only the proposed route, the group has since opposed every route except Route 3.

PACE is continuing its surge of support for Route 3 by asking residents to: read the DEIR or at least the executive summary and prepare written comments. It can be downloaded from http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/Environment/info/esa/sjxv/deir_toc.html. Copies are available at the Visalia and Woodlake library branches. Hard copies or CD copies may be requested by calling (415) 962-8409 or by email at sjxv@esassoc.com. PACE has said it believes a hearing date to decide which route the CPUC will approve may be set for Aug. 31, 2009. For more information on PACE visit www.pace-sos.com. Written comments may be submitted to the CPUC by July 31. Comments can be sent by mail to Mr. Jensen Uchida, San Joaquin Valley Loop Transmission Project, c/o Environmental Science Associates, 225 Bush St., Ste. 1700, San Francisco, CA 94104.