

**CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION**

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

February 7, 2008

West-wide Energy Corridor PEIS  
Argonne National Laboratory  
9700 S. Cass Ave., Bldg. 900, Mail Stop 4  
Argonne, IL 60439

**Re: Comments on Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement,  
Designation of Energy Corridors on Federal Land in 11 Western States  
(DOE/EIS-0386)**

In response to the November 2007 release of the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Draft PEIS) proposing to designate new right-of-way energy corridors on federal lands as required by Section 368 of the National Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAAct 2005), the California Energy Commission (Energy Commission) submits the following comments.

The Energy Commission has actively participated in the PEIS process and is pleased to note that the majority of the proposed energy corridors in California follow existing rights-of-way and avoid sensitive areas that the Commission believes are neither suitable nor appropriate locations for energy corridors. While we recognize the importance of transmission infrastructure to meet the growing demands of California, we also want to take this opportunity to emphasize California's unique environmental, cultural, and scenic attributes and the need to reflect these unique attributes in corridor designation and permitting processes and procedures. We believe it is vital to protect certain "no-touch zones" in order to preserve attributes considered highly valued by Californians. The Energy Commission and other state agencies have expressed the need to avoid these no-touch zones throughout the Section 368 energy corridor process, as well as in the EPAAct 2005 Section 1221 National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor process.

In November 2005, the California Resources Agency requested that the Energy Commission represent California in the federal PEIS effort to ensure that the state's energy and infrastructure needs, renewable generation policy goals, and environmental concerns were considered in the PEIS. In December 2005, the BLM designated the Energy Commission as a cooperating agency. Thereafter, in coordination with DOE, BLM, and the USFS, the Energy Commission established and coordinated the efforts of an interagency team of federal and state agencies to review proposals to designate new and/or expand existing energy corridors and examine alternatives on California's federal lands. Participating state agencies included the Department of Fish and Game, the Native American Heritage Commission, the Public Utilities Commission, and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. In addition, the State Lands Commission

and the Department of Parks and Recreation provided input and monitored the interagency team's activities. In addition to the BLM and USFS, other federal agencies actively involved included the National Park Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the United States Air Force, the United States Marine Corps, and other Department of Defense services.

Working together, the interagency team provided information on the potential impacts corridor proposals could have on California's unique landscape, including impacts to sensitive species, recreational resources, cultural and historic resources, wild and scenic areas, and compatibility with conservation plans. The Energy Commission appreciates working closely with the federal government and believes the working relationship between state and federal agencies in the PEIS process should serve as a model of government cooperation in the future.

The Energy Commission believes that both transparency and public outreach are essential to informing the public and ensuring their involvement in any process. To that end, the Energy Commission commends the DOE, the BLM and the USFS for holding public outreach meetings on the Draft PEIS in both Sacramento and Ontario in January 2008. However, while the Draft PEIS and associated map book are detailed, the Energy Commission believes that DOE, BLM, and USFS should take additional steps, such as press releases, to ensure that the public is aware of the proposed corridor maps and supporting spatial GIS files available to them on the PEIS website (<http://corridoreis.anl.gov/>). Reviewing this information together with the Draft PEIS will allow the public to better understand the characteristics of each proposed corridor as it relates to their interests.

In February 2006, in agreement with the DOE, the BLM, and the USFS, the Energy Commission staff held its own workshops on the Section 368 PEIS effort to provide local governments, utilities, energy developers, public interest groups, and members of the public with an additional opportunity to participate. The majority of comments the Energy Commission received were from California's environmental community and primarily concerned the avoidance of corridor designation in areas it believed inappropriate, either specific named places or types of places to avoid. A coalition of eight environmental and wilderness interests identified sensitive lands – including state and national parks, federal- and state-designated wilderness and wilderness study areas, and critical inventoried areas without roads in national forests – which they believe are not appropriate locations for energy corridors.<sup>1</sup> This list of “no touch zones” is included as an attachment to this letter. Both the coalition and the Wilderness Society

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<sup>1</sup> February 15, 2006 letter to California Energy Commission Chairman Joseph Desmond from the California Wilderness Coalition, Californians for Western Wilderness, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Environment California, Sierra Club, Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign, and Nations Parks Conservation Association. The coalition's list of inappropriate locations for energy corridors was included as Appendix A of the Energy Commission's 2007 Strategic Transmission Investment Plan and as attachments to the Commission's three letters to DOE dated July 2, 2007, October 10, 2006, and March 6, 2006 in the EPA Act 2005 Section 1221 national interest electric transmission corridor process.

members recommended that new corridors follow existing energy corridors and transportation routes whenever possible, outside of sensitive areas.

Also as mentioned in previous comments, California's transmission corridor designation process for non-federal lands was established in 2006 through Senate Bill (SB) 1059 (Escutia and Morrow, Chapter 638, California Statutes of 2006). Under this legislation, a transmission corridor can be proposed for designation by the Energy Commission itself or by any person or entity planning to build an electric transmission line in the state. A corridor would be subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act, with the Energy Commission acting as the lead agency responsible for preparing the environmental documentation required to support transmission corridor designations.

It should be noted that the California Legislature established in SB 2431 (Garamendi, Chapter 1457, Statutes of 1988) as well as in SB 1059, that the planning and siting of new transmission facilities should be pursued following principles of efficient use of the existing transmission system. These principles encourage the use of existing rights-of-way (ROW) by first upgrading existing transmission facilities where technically and economically feasible; followed by expanding existing ROW when technically and economically feasible; then creating new ROW when justified by environmental, technical, or economic reasons defined by the appropriate licensing agency. Where there is a need to construct additional transmission capacity, agreement among all interested utilities on the efficient use of that capacity should be pursued. These principles consistently guided the input of our staff in their work with the interagency team and will continue to shape our views as we move forward designating state transmission corridors. The Energy Commission is pleased to see that the proposed corridors in the Draft PEIS generally adhere to these principles.

Competing land uses are exerting significant pressure throughout California to set aside lands for transmission corridors before options are foreclosed. California's new corridor designation process supports and facilitates the preservation of land needed for transmission infrastructure on non-federal lands and could be used to interconnect federal energy corridors with state-designated transmission corridors to facilitate the timely permitting of high-voltage transmission projects by both federal and state agencies in a coordinated manner. In this way, transmission corridors consistent with long-term planning determinations can be preserved for later use.

SB 1059 further requires that any corridor proposed for designation must be consistent with the needs and objectives identified in the Energy Commission's *Strategic Transmission Investment Plan (Strategic Plan)*.<sup>2</sup> In its *2007 Strategic Plan* the Energy Commission specifically encourages applications for corridors on non-federal lands that

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<sup>2</sup> The *Strategic Plan* creates a blueprint for the development of an efficient and reliable bulk transmission system for California. It plays a critical role in identifying needed transmission investments that inform the state's corridor designation process. The *Strategic Plan* identifies and recommends actions required to implement investments needed to ensure reliability, relieve congestion, and meet future growth in load and generation, including renewable resources, energy efficiency, and other demand reduction measures.

would either interconnect with existing federal corridors or with proposed federal corridors identified in the PEIS effort.

### **Specific Comments**

Figure 1.1-1 of the Draft PEIS does not show any power plants in California greater than 1,000 MW in capacity. Jim Bartridge of the Energy Commission staff provided a spatial GIS layer with these power plants to ANL's Dr. Ihor Hlohowskyj via email on January 15, 2008.

For corridor 27-225 as shown on Map D8 of the large-scale base map series, the Energy Commission recommends restricting the corridor to the north of Interstate 15 only, in order to avoid possible corridor encroachment into the Mojave National Preserve. Similarly, for corridor 27-41 on the same map, restrict expansion to the south of Interstate 40 only, in order to avoid possible corridor encroachment into the Mojave National Preserve. National Preserves are not appropriate locations for energy corridors or future energy transmission projects.

For corridor 30-52 as shown on Map D9 of the large-scale map series, the Energy Commission recommends restricting the corridor to the south of Interstate 10 only, in order to avoid possible corridor encroachment into the Joshua Tree National Park. National Parks are not appropriate locations for energy corridors or future energy transmission projects.

If you have any questions concerning our comments please contact:

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft PEIS. We look forward to working closely with DOE and other federal agencies to ensure that the development of future generation resources and transmission infrastructure are consistent with the energy needs and policy objectives of California.

Sincerely,

JACKALYNE PFANNENSTIEL  
Chairman

Enclosure

*2007 Strategic Transmission Investment Plan*, California Energy Commission  
publication no. CEC-700-2007-018 CMF, November 2007.

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## **Attachment**

### **Wild Places at Risk**

#### **Bureau of Land Management Wilderness**

- Black Mountain Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Carrizo Gorge wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Coyote Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Fish Creek Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Kelso Dunes Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Little Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Mecca Hills Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Newberry Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Nopa Range Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Old Woman Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Orocopia Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Palo Verde Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Piute Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Rodman Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Rice Valley Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Sawtooth Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Stepladder Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Turtle Mountains Wilderness, BLM California Desert Conservation Area

#### **Bureau of Land Management Wilderness Study Areas**

- Cady Mountains Wilderness Study Area, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Death Valley #17 Wilderness Study Area, BLM California Desert Conservation Area
- Dry Valley Rim Wilderness Study Area, BLM Eagle Lake Field Office
- Skedaddle Wilderness Study Area, BLM Eagle Lake Field Office
- Soda Mountains Wilderness Study Area, BLM California Desert Conservation Area

#### **National Forest Wilderness**

- Cucamonga Wilderness, San Bernardino National Forest
- Desolation Wilderness, Eldorado National Forest
- Ishi Wilderness, Lassen National Forest
- Mokelumne Wilderness, Eldorado National Forest

### **National Forest Inventoried Roadless Areas**

- Caples Creek Roadless Area, Eldorado National Forest
- Cajon Roadless Area, San Bernardino National Forest
- Circle Mountain Roadless Area, San Bernardino National Forest
- Cucamonga Roadless Area, San Bernardino National Forest
- Dardanelles Roadless Area, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
- Fish Canyon Roadless Area, Angeles National Forest
- Freel Roadless Area, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
- Grizzly Mountain Roadless Area, Plumas National Forest
- Heart Lake Roadless Area, Lassen National Forest
- Ishi Roadless Area, Lassen National Forest
- Magic Mountain Roadless Area, Angeles National Forest
- Middle Fort Feather River Roadless Area, Plumas National Forest
- Mill Creek Roadless Area, Lassen National Forest
- Red Mountain Roadless Area, Angeles National Forest
- Salt Creek Roadless Area, Angeles National Forest
- Salt Springs Roadless Area, Eldorado National Forest
- San Sevaine Roadless Area, San Bernardino National Forest
- Steele Swamp Roadless Area, Modoc National Forest
- Strawberry Peak Roadless Area, Angeles National Forest
- Tragedy-Elephant's Back Roadless Area, Eldorado National Forest
- Tule Roadless Area, Angeles National Forest
- West Fork Roadless Area, Angeles National Forest
- Wild Cattle Mountain Roadless Area, Lassen National Forest

### **National Parks**

- Death Valley National Park
- Joshua Tree National Park
- Lassen Volcanic National Park
- Mojave National Preserve

### **State Parks**

- Anza-Borrego Desert State Park