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## LAKE ELSINORE: Environmentalists want strong action against power-line proposal

By MICHAEL J. WILLIAMS - Staff Writer

LAKE ELSINORE ---- Three environmental advocacy groups are urging a state agency to pull the plug on a proposed power line that would serve a hydroelectric plant planned in the mountains west of Lake Elsinore.

At the very least, the California Public Utilities Commission should make it tougher for the power line proponent to resubmit its plan to build a transmission line that would connect the plant to the state's power grid, the groups argue in written comments forwarded to the commission Monday.

The commission is scheduled Thursday to consider denying Nevada Hydro Co.'s application for the 32-mile line, based on a staff recommendation contending the application remains incomplete despite numerous requests for more information.

However, in her recommendation, administrative law judge Angela K. Minkin also advises the commission to allow the Vista-based firm to resubmit the application when it comes up with the missing information.

The conservation groups urge the commission to dismiss the application, but also ask the five-member panel to quash it forever or specify strict requirements on a resubmitted application. The comments were written by representatives of the Center for Biological Diversity and submitted on behalf of that group, the Santa Ana Mountains Task Force of the Sierra Club and Friends of the Forest and the Santa Rosa Plateau.

"We think it's time for the Public Utilities Commission to reject this proposal in its entirety," Jonathan Evans of the Center for Biological Diversity said Wednesday. "What Nevada Hydro has made clear is they intend just to resubmit the application and not make substantive changes that the Public Utilities Commission has requested, which is a drain on everybody's time and resources."

Nevada Hydro plans to develop the hydroelectric plant in conjunction with the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District. The project would result in water being pumped from Lake Elsinore at night, when power is cheaper, and stored in a reservoir in the mountains. The water would be released downhill to turn electricity-generating turbines in the plant, which would be built next to the lake.

Proponents say the reservoir would help keep the lake's water level stabilized and the system would increase the region's power supply. Opponents contend the project would be environmentally destructive and will be a waste of money.

The project hinges on the ability to move electricity to the existing power grid over the proposed transmission lines, which would stretch from a substation north of Lake Elsinore through the Cleveland National Forest and connect with power lines from the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station west of Camp Pendleton. Nevada Hydro plans to construct a power substation on a section of the base called Case Springs, a development that requires clearance from the Marines.

Nevada Hydro Project Manager David Kates said in March that getting the Marines' permission has been the biggest hang-up, but he expected that to happen eventually, after which the company could resubmit the application to the state commission.

The environmental groups in their comments argue the Marines are opposed to the substation, as evidenced by e-mail exchanges submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which also has jurisdiction over the project. The conservation groups submitted the exchanges to the Public Utilities Commission as attachments to their comments.

In one of the exchanges, an officer tells a consultant for Nevada Hydro the base's commanding officer "has determined that it would not be in the best interest of this Base or the Marine Corps to allow the siting of this substation anywhere in this area of the Base."

The communication, however, indicates the decision was preliminary, and would be formalized in a written response to Nevada Hydro. Leaders of the base's operations and training division were not available for comment Thursday.

Kates said company representatives remain confident the Marines have not ended their deliberations on the proposed substation. He said he believes the company will prevail when the significance of the entire project is understood.

"There are much bigger issues at stake here," he said. "We're proposing to bring 500 more jobs for five years to Riverside County, which is sorely in need of jobs. The pumped storage attached to the transmission line is vital to the state's efforts to bring renewable energy on line. It's been identified as a critical project by the Californian Energy Commission. These are much larger issues than these (conservation) groups realize."

Evans compared the hydroelectric plant project, which has been planned for more than a decade, to the movie "The Night of the Living Dead."

"It's the project that just won't die," he said.

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