

## **SDG&E maintains best option is line through Anza-Borrego**

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As ordered by state regulators, San Diego Gas & Electric has disclosed alternate routes it considered for its proposed Sunrise Powerlink that don't cross Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

But the utility insists none of the alternates would reduce the environmental impact of the transmission line, which SDG&E says would best be run across the state park.

### **Graphic:**



### [Sunrise Powerlink routes](#)

That path would traverse more than 20 miles of Anza-Borrego park and is the route that SDG&E is asking the California Public Utilities Commission to approve.

If completed as envisioned by the utility, the electric transmission line would stretch 150 miles from Imperial County across northern San Diego County and cost about \$1.3 billion to construct. The line would provide enough electricity for about 650,000 homes.

The proposal has met stiff opposition from residents in the line's path and from environmentalists, who say it is unnecessary. Business and labor groups have rallied in support of the project.

The PUC last month requested information about routes outside Anza-Borrego as part of its review of the utility's application for the route through the park.

The commission hopes the information on routes outside the park will be useful in a workshop it has ordered SDG&E to hold with opponents and supporters of the project sometime this month.

After at least another year of review, the PUC is expected to approve or reject SDG&E's application for the preferred Sunrise Powerlink route.

SDG&E said in its filing to the PUC late Monday that the alternate routes would bring up to 50 homes as well as American Indian lands and the Cleveland National Forest within the impact range of the new power line.

“Essentially, placement of a new 500-kilovolt line in any of the three alternative segments in this area would simply transfer impacts from one area to another without reducing significant impacts,” wrote E. Gregory Barnes, an attorney for SDG&E, in disclosing the routes to the PUC.

One alternate that SDG&E has described in the filing would run near the Southwest Powerlink, an existing east-west electric transmission line. The utility argues this route would undercut a prime purpose for a new power line – bolstering regional electric reliability – because its proximity to an existing line means that a single wildfire could disable both.

The two other alternatives parallel Southwest for a shorter distance before veering northwest to reach a proposed substation near Santa Ysabel.

All alternatives avoiding Anza-Borrego, SDG&E said in the filing, would have a greater environmental impact than the utility's preferred route. Two alternates would cross Cuyamaca Rancho State Park.

SDG&E's preferred route, on the other hand, would cross more than 20 miles of Anza-Borrego park.

The utility asserted in its filing this preferred route had been anticipated by park officials in their recently completed general plan for the park. That plan notes that there is an existing power line crossing the park.

The Sunrise Powerlink, however, would require replacing the wooden poles now supporting the smaller line with towers 120 feet or 130 feet high.

SDG&E says the line will be needed by 2010 to ensure regional electric reliability and allow access to electricity that it expects will be generated from renewable energy sources planned for Imperial County.

Opponents of Sunrise say the line isn't needed for renewable energy or reliability. They contend that SDG&E will use Sunrise to move power from fossil fuel burning plants in Mexico and Arizona to markets north of San Diego.

Two opponents said the filing fell short of what should be explored.

"The company appears to have deliberately selected the worst possible alternatives for people and nature in a cynical attempt to refocus attention on their preferred route through Anza-Borrego," said David Hogan of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Hogan said the utility should have considered conservation and energy efficiency programs that would not require a new major power line.

Kelly Fuller of the Sierra Club, which also opposes the project, said she was disappointed that the utility was not required to explore a broader range of alternatives.

"All this looking at alternative routes is taking away from the main focus, which should be exploring alternatives that don't require a power line," Fuller said.

Those alternatives include bolstering electric generation and transmission resources within the county, she said. Renewable energy developed in Imperial County, Fuller said, could reach California consumers through other routes already planned north of San Diego.

Greg Parks, policy coordinator for the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber continued to support the Sunrise project.

"When our board took its position, it was based upon the original route," Parks said. "If SDG&E says these alternatives would cause more environmental damage and not be as reliable, we would have to support the original plan."

The PUC is expected to issue a schedule for its review process later this month.

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