

Desert valley could see wind turbines

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May 15, 2007

A federal agency is proposing to open up thousands of acres of McCain Valley for wind turbines, a prospect troubling environmentalists who say the pristine desert in San Diego County's backcountry should remain undisturbed.



JIM BAIRD / Union-Tribune

These support cables are bracing a wind-testing tower placed next to McCain Valley Road in the county's backcountry. The wind turbines in the distance are next to Interstate 8.

The federal Bureau of Land Management included the proposal in a draft resource management plan covering more than 103,000 acres in eastern San Diego County from Boulevard to Julian. The agency is accepting comments on the draft plan until May 31.

The bureau is updating the management plan, which was written in 1981, because it doesn't include areas federally designated as wilderness or habitat for the endangered peninsular bighorn sheep and the Quino checkerspot butterfly, said Tom Zale, an associate field manager for the agency.

Five alternatives are being considered in the updated plan, ranging from one that emphasizes conservation to another that greatly opens the area for commercial and recreational use. The BLM says the preferred alternative strikes a balance between preserving natural resources and allowing some use.

Graphic:



BLM plan

The proposal that has drawn the most concern calls for opening 7,059 acres in western McCain Valley for wind energy. Environmentalists fear the wind turbines will destroy the stark beauty of the landscape dotted by massive boulders and chaparral.

PPM Energy, a wind energy company based in Portland, Ore., has four testing towers in

