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REGION: Group sues to halt power line

By DAVE DOWNEY - Staff Writer

An environmental group petitioned the state Supreme Court late Wednesday to overturn the California Public Utilities Commission's December approval of the 123-mile Sunrise Powerlink high-voltage transmission line in southeast San Diego County.

The Center for Biological Diversity asserts that the commission's 4-1 vote authorizing the \$1.9 billion project should be thrown out because the regulatory agency failed to make San Diego Gas & Electric Co. find the most environmentally friendly route.

Ileen Anderson, a biologist for the group in Los Angeles, said that while the commission forced the utility to abandon a North County route through Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, it still approved a route that will greatly harm the environment.

Anderson said it would have been better to follow Interstate 8 all the way from El Centro to San Diego to keep the industrial-style metal towers in an area already partly developed.

She said the commission violated state laws by not keeping environmental damage to a minimum.

The group also claimed the decision is invalid because it did not require the utility to guarantee the line will carry green power from Imperial Valley, where sun, wind and geothermal power plants are being built.

But Jennifer Briscoe, a spokeswoman for SDG&E, said in effect the group is trying to overturn the very vehicle necessary to deliver large amounts of Imperial Valley green, renewable power to San Diego County, at a time when the state is trying to curb carbon emissions from fossil-fuel plants that cause global warming.

"It's counter to what they say they are in favor of," Briscoe said.

Briscoe said SDG&E does not expect the suit to succeed.

"The Center for Biological Diversity and other opponents are well aware that the Sunrise Powerlink is one of the most rigorously reviewed utility projects in California history," she said, citing the 11,000-page environmental study prepared for it.

SDG&E expects to break ground on the project in 2010 and complete it in 2012.

Contact staff writer Dave Downey at (760) 745-6611, Ext. 2623, or ddowney@nctimes.com.