

# Groups ask California to halt Sempra Sunrise line

By Bernie Woodall

LOS ANGELES, Jan 23 (Reuters) - Two environmental groups on Friday asked the California Public Utilities Commission for a rehearing of its decision last month to allow Sempra Energy (SRE.N) to build the \$2 billion Sunrise Powerlink transmission project.

The action comes two days after the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the California Supreme Court to review the utilities commission's decision. That environmental group was joined by the Sierra Club in Friday's petition to the California Public Utilities Commission.

Neither the state Supreme Court nor the commission has said if the Sunrise Powerlink will get a fresh hearing.

The Sunrise Powerlink has been one of the most controversial powerline projects in California history. The line would run 123 miles to northern San Diego County from Imperial County, which borders Mexico and Arizona. It would power about 650,000 homes.

Imperial County has much geothermal power potential, which Sempra says will be carried on Sunrise Powerlink.

Ileene Anderson of the Center for Biological Diversity said there is enough solar power and other renewable power resources near San

Diego for the utility to develop and make Sunrise unnecessary.

Sempra said the petition to the California high court and state utility regulator was not a surprise. Sempra and its utility, San Diego Gas & Electric, do not expect the challenges to be successful and say Sunrise will still open in 2012.

"This action ... can only serve to delay development of renewables in our region, which is counter to state policy," said Sempra spokeswoman Jennifer Ramp.

While environmentalists say the line is not necessary, Ramp pointed to studies by state and federal officials confirming the need for the Sunrise Powerlink.

The Center for Biological Diversity said the utilities commission's 4-1 vote on Dec. 18 to allow Sunrise should be nullified because Sempra is not required to run a minimum amount of renewable power on Sunrise.

California requires 20 percent of power delivered must be from renewable sources by 2010. That goal is expected to be increased to 33 percent by 2020.

When the utilities commission approved the ratepayer-funded project, commissioners said they were confident San Diego Gas & Electric

would keep written commitments to transit renewable power on the Sunrise Powerlink.

The U.S. Forestry Service has yet to approve 19 miles of the Sunrise Powerlink crossing the Cleveland National Forest. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management on Jan. 20 said OK to Sunrise passing along 49 miles of its jurisdiction. (Reporting by Bernie Woodall; Editing by Gary Hill)

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