

## San Miguel County Joins Westwide Energy Corridor Lawsuit

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by Watch Staff

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TELLURIDE – To most Americans, the West evokes thoughts of blue skies, untouched wilderness, pristine open spaces and plentiful wildlife. Yet those iconic images – and the legacy they represent – are threatened by a Federal energy corridor plan that has become a reality, say opponents of the West-Wide Energy Corridors (WVEC).

After more than a year of expressing vocal opposition to the West-Wide Energy Corridors, which would carve a 3,500-foot, 6,000-mile swathe through 3.2 million acres of Federal lands in 11 western states, San Miguel County has officially joined with numerous conservation and environmental organizations as a plaintiff in a legal challenge to the federally adopted WVEC Plan.

The lawsuit, filed Wednesday, July 8, in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, challenges the Bush-era plan, arguing that WVEC, as adopted, ignores overwhelming public support for renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and geothermal power, and focuses instead on building energy corridors in support of new or existing dirty coal-fired power plants.

“We need the federal government to be working side by side with our Western Governors, as well as with the leaders of the affected individual states and local governments, to build a new energy economy for the West based on clean, renewable energy sources,” said San Miguel County Commissioner Art Goodtimes. Commissioner Goodtimes also expressed the hope “that the Obama Administration will work with us to fix the flaws in this hasty, ill-conceived plan.”

Taking a leading role in the litigation are The Wilderness Society, The Center for Biological Diversity and Earthjustice. According to County Attorney Steven J. Zwick, serving as counsel of record for the litigation will be Amy Atwood, senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, and Jim Angell, a senior attorney at Earthjustice’s Denver office.

At stake is the future not only of the American West, but of the Earth itself, litigants say.

“These corridors could have identified the best places for moving green energy across our public lands, but the Bush Administration ignored available scientific data and proposed corridors that threaten the scenic, cultural and natural values of some America’s most popular and beloved public lands,” said Nada Culver, senior counsel for The Wilderness Society. “The Obama Administration has an opportunity to bring this plan in line with the West’s goals to tap into its renewable energy potential while also protecting the region’s wildlife and special places.”