

1. **PUBLIC LANDS:** Groups sue U.S. over energy-transmission corridors (07/08/2009)

Noelle Straub, E&E reporter

Fourteen conservation groups and a Colorado county sued the federal government yesterday over 6,000 miles of electricity transmission corridors on Western public lands, saying they link to coal-burning power plants and not renewable-energy generators.

The lawsuit against the Interior, Agriculture and Energy departments filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California says the transmission corridors perpetuate the use of coal-fired power throughout the West and leave stranded or underserved many areas with renewable energy resources.

The groups include the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, National Parks Conservation Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Wilderness Society and San Miguel County, Colo.

The lawsuit charges that the agencies "created a sprawling, hopscotch network of 6,000 miles of rights-of-way" without considering environmental impacts, analyzing alternatives, weighing federal policies that support renewable energy, ensuring the corridors' consistency with federal and local land-use plans and consulting other federal agencies or Western states and local governments.

The Energy Policy Act of 2005 directs federal agencies to designate corridors for the development of electricity transmission and distribution facilities on federal public land in 11 Western states, and to perform any environmental reviews that may be required for them. As the proposal developed, many of the conservation groups criticized it during public meetings and through written comments, which they accuse the federal agencies of ignoring.

In January, just a week before the Bush administration left office, the Bureau of Land Management and the Agriculture Department signed a "record of decision" amending their respective land-use plans in the states to designate preferred areas, known as "West-wide Energy Corridors," for expedited federal siting of electricity transmission lines, pipelines and other energy infrastructure.

The lawsuit says the agencies violated a host of laws, including the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Federal Land and Policy Management Act, and the Endangered Species Act. The 11 states are Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

A BLM spokesman said the agency cannot comment on any pending litigation.

Katie Renshaw, an Earthjustice attorney who helped lead the suit, said the groups are hoping the Obama administration will decide not to defend the corridors and to instead sit down and discuss a possible settlement. She said the administration's and the groups' goals are in sync.

"In order to develop solar and wind, you have to have transmission to connect that to the cities and the need," Renshaw said. "It's a really good opportunity, a good shift from old dirty energy to new clean energy."

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has often charged the Bush administration with focusing on oil and gas permitting and ignoring renewable energies and has promised to shift that focus. His first secretarial order established a task force to help the department identify specific renewable energy zones on public lands. But he also expressed support for moving forward with the transmission corridors already identified by the department ([E&ENews PM](#), March 11).

The other plaintiffs include Bark, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Oregon Natural Desert Association, the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Western Resource Advocates and the Western Watersheds Project.

[Click here](#) to read the conservation group's complaint.



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