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LAKE ELSINORE: Controversial power line plan resubmitted

TRANSMISSION HOOKUP NEEDED FOR POWER PLANT

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A company planning to build a hydroelectric plant west of Lake Elsinore has resubmitted its application to a state agency for the construction of a 500-kilovolt electrical transmission line that would connect the plant to the state's power grid.

Vista-based Nevada Hydro Co. is seeking the California Public Utilities Commission's permission to erect a 32-mile power line connecting San Diego Gas & Electric Co.'s Talega-Escondido line in San Diego County to Southern California Edison's Valley-Serrano transmission system north of Lake Elsinore.

The \$353 million transmission line project includes two substations, one connecting with the Talega-Escondido line at or near Camp Pendleton's border with the Cleveland National Forest and one connecting the line to the proposed hydroelectric power plant.

First proposed in 1987, the Lake Elsinore Advanced Pumped Storage project would result in water being pumped from Lake Elsinore at night when power is cheaper and stored in a reservoir in the mountains west of the lake. During the day, the water would be released downhill to power electricity-generating turbines.

Proponents say the reservoir would help stabilize the lake's water level while increasing the region's power supply. Opponents maintain the project would wreak environmental destruction and is a waste of money.

Nevada Hydro's new application, officially submitted June 4, comes after the commission in April 2009 rejected the company's previous application for the power line.

Nevada Hydro spokesman David Kates said the rejection occurred because the company could not get the Marine Corps to sign off on locating a power substation on Camp Pendleton.

The new application states the southern substation would be located in the right of way for the Talega-Escondido transmission line, Kates said, adding that its location was shifted at the direction of the commission.

"Nothing has really changed except the footprint for where this substation is going to be located," he said.

The application does not specify exactly where the substation would be within that right of way, but leaves that decision to the commission, he said.

No matter where the station is located, the path of the line would cut through the Cleveland National Forest. Environmentalists have strongly opposed the transmission line as well as the hydroelectric project, a joint venture with the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District.

John Buse, a senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, said his organization would vigorously oppose Nevada Hydro's new application.

"We have environmental concerns because, as I understand it, the line

would still be routed through portions of the Cleveland National Forest, including relatively sensitive areas that we would rather not see burdened with a new transmission line," he said.

While the transmission line connection is motivated primarily by the power plant project, Nevada Hydro's application contends the connection itself would be a benefit by providing another energy conduit from the state power grid to San Diego.

"The TE/VS Interconnect therefore is crucially important to meet the needs of the growing San Diego area," Nevada Hydro's application states.

Kates, Nevada Hydro's spokesman, said the commission's approval is the last step needed for the transmission line project to go forward.

"If we're successful in getting through the Public Utilities Commission, we'll be able to build it and provide jobs to the local area and provide better (electrical) rates to the ratepayers. So, we think it's important," he said.

Buse, however, disputed the idea that another transmission line is needed in the area, especially at the expense of public land.

"Certainly, I think the public can tolerate some of these transmission lines on public land if they're needed, but here we have pretty good evidence that this isn't needed," he said. "We're pretty skeptical of the stated need for these facilities."