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LAKE ELSINORE: Draft ruling dings power line application

HYDROELECTRIC PLANT WOULD DEPEND ON HIGH-POWERED WIRES

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LAKE ELSINORE--An administrative law judge issued a recommendation released Tuesday that could throw a wrench into plans to build a hydroelectric plant west of the lake.

Administrative Law Judge Angela K. Minkin advised the state Public Utilities Commission to dismiss Nevada Hydro's application to build transmission lines that would connect the plant with the state's power grid. The Vista-based company is teaming up with the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District to build the Lake Elsinore Advanced Pumped Storage Project, which is estimated to cost more than \$1 billion.

Minkin wrote in her draft decision that the Vista-based company has repeatedly failed to provide environmental information required by the commission's staff and recommended that the commission should no longer waste time and resources on the application. Her proposed ruling, which will be considered by the commissioners in the ensuing weeks, does not prevent the company from resubmitting the application, however.

"We recognize that the Project may have potential benefits and we

encourage (the) Applicant to take the time and invest the necessary resources to develop an updated application that includes a complete Proponent's Environmental Assessment that fully addresses all our concerns," she states.

Environmental advocates, in a release issued by the Center for Biological Diversity, urged the commission to dismiss the application, which they said would send Nevada Hydro back to the point when it originally submitted the application in October 2007. Gene Frick, a representative of the Sierra Club and Friends of the Forest, states that the commission, in accepting the ruling, ought to "put an end to Nevada Hydro's boondoggle."

Nevada Hydro representative David Kates characterized the recommendation as "really not too big of a deal." He said the hang-up with the application comes from the lack of clearance from the Marine Corps. As proposed, the 32-mile transmission line would stretch from an electrical substation north of Lake Elsinore, run southwest through the mountains west of Lake Elsinore where the power plant would be built, and veer west through the Cleveland National Forest. The lines would connect with a substation at the eastern edge of Camp Pendleton, from which existing power

lines hook up with the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station.

"The PUC wants us to get concurrence from the Marine Corps," Kates said. "When that happens, we will resubmit pretty much the same application as we had before."

The transmission lines are crucial for the hydroelectric plant to succeed in providing electricity to the state's power grid. The 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. The water would be released downhill to power electricity-generating turbines in a plant next to the lake. Proponents say the reservoir would help to keep the lake's water level stabilized and the system would increase the region's power supply.

Opponents contend the project would be environmentally destructive and wasteful of taxpayers' money. A recent grand jury report advised the water district to heed its own consultants' reports indicating the proposal didn't appear to pencil out. The water district has yet to file an official response, but representatives downplayed the findings as based on an incomplete understanding of the project.