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## POWERLINK MAY HINGE ON CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST SUPERVISOR: Attorney for 3 Community and Environmental Groups Sends Legal Notice to Metz; Metz Speaks With East County Magazine



By Miriam Raftery

July 9, 2009 (San Diego, Calif.)- An attorney for three community and environmental groups sent a letter today urging Cleveland National Forest Supervisor William Metz to reject construction of the Sunrise Powerlink transmission line project across the forest. The letter describes in detail numerous legal conflicts between Powerlink and the Forest's overarching management plan. The group also calls on the Forest Service to combine consideration of the Powerlink with an inter-related pending decision: a new Forest Service permit

for miles of SDG&E's existing power lines in the forest.

The Sunrise Powerlink transmission line through southern San Diego County was approved by two state and federal agencies, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in December and January 2008. Appeals have been filed by the three groups, which argue that those approvals are flawed. Other agencies must also provide additional approvals for the project to proceed.

Cleveland National Forest Supervisor William Metz is currently considering whether to allow the Powerlink to cross miles of the forest and whether the project will follow the terms of the Forest's management plan. Metz is also separately considering whether to renew expired permits to SDG&E for all existing power lines on the forest.

East County Magazine interviewed Metz on July 8, one day before the letter was sent. "Currently there is no hard and fast timeline for approval," he said. "We are currently working with SDG&E to complete resource assessments within the footprint assessments for Sunrise Powerlink, including biological and heritage resource assessments." After reviewing information provided by SDG&E's consultants, a Forest Service biologist and archaeologist will verify whether the assessment is consistent with a BLM assessment, he said, adding that the process will likely take a couple of months.

Since the BLM was the lead agency that made a decision on Powerlink, Metz observed, "The environmental analysis process has been completed. We'll be looking at Powerlink's specific footprint on Cleveland to make sure that it's consistent with the BLM process," he said, adding that fire mitigation is a component of that process.

Asked if there will be an opportunity for public input, Metz replied, "It's complex because the decision has really already been made through the BLM process. The only way at this juncture that we would open up for public scoping and comment period would be if we determined that Cleveland National Forest needed to do a supplemental EIS (environmental impact assessment)."

ECM was unaware of the legal demand letter at the time of this interview. We did, however, ask Metz if he had seen the Powerlink Protest song (photo) with lyrics calling on him by name to save the Forest. Those lyrics read in part: "We know you love the forest, too. You can stop them if you want to, William Metz." (View the video and read full lyrics here: <http://www.eastcountymagazine.org/?q=node/1303>).

Metz said he was aware of the video but hadn't seen it. However his staff has brought the lyrics to his attention. "I guess I'm part of folk lore now," he said with a chuckle.

Some have voiced concern that Obama appointee David Hayes, new deputy secretary of the Interior Department and a former SDG&E lobbyist, could be involved in the Powerlink decision. (There has been a proposal in Washington introduced in the waning months of the Bush administration to move the Forest Service from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior, the Washington Post reported in March 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/24/AR2008032402510.html> .)

Asked whether Hayes or other officials higher up in the U.S. Forest Service would be involved in the decision, Metz replied, "I can't speak to that potentially. But right now the decision to approve or approve Sunrise Powerlink will be made here on the Cleveland National Forest."

Stephan Volker, attorney for the three groups that sent a legal demand letter to Metz, said the fundamental problem with locating Powerlink in the Cleveland National Forest is that "the project would cause enormous harm to the forest, yet Powerlink environmental review documents treated this area as an afterthought." He added, "The Cleveland National Forest Land Management Plan is supposed to be a blueprint to conserve forest resources. Yet we found page after page of gross conflicts between the Powerlink and the management plan."

"Forest Supervisor Metz needs to step up and do the right thing by conducting the legally required environmental and other reviews for the selected route that SDG&E, the BLM, and the Public Utilities Commission all failed to do", urged Donna Tisdale of Back County Against Dumps. "This is a matter of law, public trust, and personal responsibility."

Laura Cyphert, president of the East County Community Action Coalition, observed, "One of our greatest concerns is the potential for the Powerlink to ignite another Cedar or Witch Creek inferno or interfere with firefighting. The Powerlink can't be allowed to shove aside the forest plan promises to reduce the threat of wildfire."

"The Cleveland National Forest is here to protect natural resources and nature-based recreation opportunities for the people of San Diego," said Denis Trafecanty, President of The Protect Our Communities Foundation. "It's not here to provide a path of least resistance for massive industrial projects with little public benefit like the Powerlink."

The Sunrise Powerlink is a major new electrical transmission line proposed by San Diego Gas and Electric for construction from the Imperial Valley to central San Diego County near Poway. SDG&E contends the line is necessary to meet our region's future electrical needs. The utility has claimed that the line would carry renewable energy, but refused to agree to any minimum percentage of renewable energy when requested by a CPUC member.

A press release issued by the three groups describes the line as follows: "Like a dead-end freeway with local off-ramps, the Powerlink would consist of a larger capacity 500kV line to a remote rural area east of Alpine, smaller 230kV lines continuing on to central San Diego, and plans by SDG&E to extend the larger capacity "freeway" lines to greater Los Angeles through wilderness and communities. SDG&E's claims that the Powerlink would carry renewable energy is greenwash - In fact, the Powerlink would provide a highly profitable connection between SDG&E parent company Sempra Energy's enormous natural gas infrastructure in northern Baja California and the southern California market."

Visit The Protect Our Communities Foundation website to see the letter and a summary of conflicts between the forest plan the Powerlink: <http://protectourcommunities.org/>

The Protect Our Communities Foundation is a non-profit community organization dedicated to the promotion of a safe, reliable, economical, renewable, and environmentally responsible energy future for San Diego County. <http://www.protectourcommunities.org>

Backcountry Against Dumps is a community organization comprising numerous individuals and families residing in the eastern San Diego community of Boulevard who are directly affected by the southern route of the Powerlink and the destruction of nearby federal land for inappropriate wind energy development.

The East County Community Action Coalition ("ECCAC") is a coalition of community groups with the common goal of preserving rural quality of life and natural resources in eastern San Diego County. [www.EastCountyAction.org](http://www.EastCountyAction.org)

To read SDG&E's arguments in favor of Powerlink, visit [www.sunrisepowerlink.com](http://www.sunrisepowerlink.com).

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