



U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0552

June 22, 2010

Mr. William Metz
Supervisor, Cleveland National Forest
10845 Rancho Bernardo Road, Ste 200
San Diego, CA 92127-2107

Dear Supervisor Metz:

I am writing to provide official comment on a matter of significant concern and discussion in our community, the proposed Sunrise Powerlink transmission line by San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E). I would like to preface my remarks by thanking you for providing myself and the public with the opportunity to submit comment on this very important matter. I recognize that this action was not mandated as part of your responsibility of determining how this project affected the management plan of the Cleveland National Forest (CNF), but I firmly believe it was necessary to ensure that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) had a full comprehension and understanding of the concerns San Diego County residents have regarding this issue. Your willingness to take these additional steps will produce additional clarity on a complicated and controversial matter and is very much appreciated and a credit to your office as a custodian of the public's natural resources.

As I have indicated to you before, both in person and through correspondence, I have several concerns with the Sunrise Powerlink project and I continue to consistently hear from my constituents on this matter, many of which are neighbors with the CNF. These concerns range from the proposed route being located in sensitive, fire-prone areas, to this project adversely affecting critical habitat for endangered and sensitive species. My constituents are worried how this project will decrease their property values, as well as take away the scenic natural beauty that has been a defining characteristic of East San Diego County since the days of the indigenous Kumeyaay people. While these concerns were also made during the environmental review process by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), many believe the decision to approve this project was made long before my constituents were allowed to provide comment. Unfortunately, in reviewing how the decision-making process has occurred on this project thus far, I cannot say that I disagree.

I fully understand and support the need to implement alternative energy solutions for our nation, particularly in San Diego County, which is highly reliant upon imported energy resources. Let me be clear, I believe becoming energy independent would substantially increase

our national security, create American jobs and improve our environment and natural resources. American's reliance on foreign nations to meet our energy needs poses a significant national security risk and must be addressed swiftly and appropriately. At the same time, however, rushing into a project that has not been fully researched to determine possible ramifications to taxpayers and the suitability of route sites is simply not prudent. The fact of the matter remains that all energy alternatives regarding this project have not been completely researched and pursued to determine if they would better meet our needs or prove to be more cost-effective for ratepayers. Full research into the technology associated with this project has not been performed and the possible threats this project poses to public safety has not been properly considered and addressed.

The Sunrise Powerlink is by no means the only available option in our efforts to pursue alternative energy for San Diego County. An area that promises great potential and has yet to be fully explored is nuclear, which I believe is a safe and effective way to produce electricity. There are currently 104 nuclear reactors operating in the U.S., which provide nearly 20 percent of our nation's energy. Nuclear power is our leading source of emission-free electricity, yet the U.S. has not built a new nuclear power plant in over 12 years. Unlike fossil fuels, nuclear fuel is relatively inexpensive. Further, there is promising research in recycling nuclear waste so that it may be used again to produce even more energy and, at the same time, reduce its toxicity. Small nuclear reactors for both fission and fusion energy production are also being developed to provide reliable 5- 50 megawatts (MW) of energy for 10-30 years without refueling.

In addition to nuclear, there exists significant promise through the availability of one of Southern California's most abundant resources, solar energy. Studies indicate that the potential exists to generate 5,000 MW of energy through solar by utilizing San Diego roof tops and parking lots. Urban projects can avoid the lengthy environmental review and legal delays that large remote projects frequently entail. Southern California Edison has already recently approved large solar roof projects and, when you take into consideration the potential that exists through large structures such as our local military bases, university and college campuses and hospital complexes, it is easy to see how the developing of on-site renewable energy projects will produce great results, not just in reducing reliance on the power grid, but in keeping our community safe and pristine.

Aside from the availability of alternate energy resources, I also have concerns with the proposed route for the Sunrise Powerlink project, which was hastily determined only after problems continued to arise with the preferred northern route crossing critical habitat and endangered environmental areas on state public lands. The current proposed route not only crosses sensitive areas in the CNF, but encroaches upon countless areas of private lands and disrupts quality of life conditions in many incorporated and unincorporated areas of East San Diego County. No better example can be made than the community of Alpine, which will have its main street through its downtown area under construction for up to two years so that two parallel high voltage lines can be placed underground, part of which will run and operate directly adjacent to an elementary school. There is no doubt this will create problems for Alpine's small

business community which, like many in our nation, are struggling with the current economic environment and raises concerns for parents regarding the health and well-being of their children.

Regarding public safety, the Sunrise Powerlink project poses an increased threat of wildfire from lightning strikes, malfunctioning turbines, substations, underground vaults, and related infrastructure. As you know, this region has been devastated by massive wildfires twice in the past six years. Mandatory evacuations were implemented, many lives were lost and millions of dollars in property were completely destroyed. It simply is not prudent to introduce a new project into an area already prone to wildfire and one that will also reduce the ability of fire fighting agencies and other first-responder emergency personnel to perform their critical responsibilities.

Additionally, this project could impact the cost of property insurance to homeowners who face increased fire threats and other related property damage from self-destructing turbines and new power lines and substations. Currently, there are already proposals in the California State Legislature to increase fees on homeowners in areas prone to wildfires. The Sunrise Powerlink project will undoubtedly increase the possibility of East County residents facing additional taxation and regulation.

The unfortunate fact of the matter is that this route is completely unnecessary. Let us assume, for purposes of this discussion, that the Sunrise Powerlink project was the only viable option of bringing additional energy to San Diego County. Even so, I have yet to be provided with a compelling explanation as to why the proposed route for this project cannot follow existing roads and easements, such as Interstate 8 and the existing power lines of the Southwest Powerlink (SWPL), thereby avoiding the intrusion into private property and public lands as is currently planned. If it is determined that the Sunrise Powerlink is absolutely necessary, collocation with the existing SWPL is a feasible and safe approach that reduces the project overall's costs and, at the same time, avoids environmental and property damage through the CNF and private and public community resources. I recognize that this collocation option was rejected early in the environmental review process due to fire statistical information provided by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire). It is my understanding, however, that the historic fire maps utilized by Cal Fire were not complete and more accurate resources are available that provide a better analysis of fire history and potential fire hazards in the area.

I truly believe we have the opportunity to make San Diego County the leader in urban alternative energy production by maximizing our potential through available resources such as solar and nuclear, or by utilizing collocation. Focusing our efforts on maximizing what we already have instead of pursuing projects that require expensive new transmission infrastructure and the acquisition and disruption of public and private properties will help move our region, and nation as a whole, toward energy independence and decreasing our reliance on foreign energy sources.

Supervisor Metz, I understand firsthand the difficulty that accompanies proper decision making when it pertains to public policy. At the same time, having worked with your office on a variety of issues, I know that ensuring that our community continues to have both a safe and healthy national forest as a local asset now and well into the future is one of your top priorities. Toward that end, I encourage you to simply reflect upon the question as you receive these concerns from myself and my constituents whether SDG&E's Sunrise Powerlink project helps or hampers the goal of maintaining the integrity of the CNF in a manner that is concurrent with public safety and then make your decision accordingly.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with my thoughts and concerns on this important subject. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions, or if I may be of assistance in any way regarding this matter.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Duncan Hunter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "H".

Duncan Hunter
Member of Congress

DH/mrh