

*The SunZia Project and Rapid Response Team for Transmission Brief
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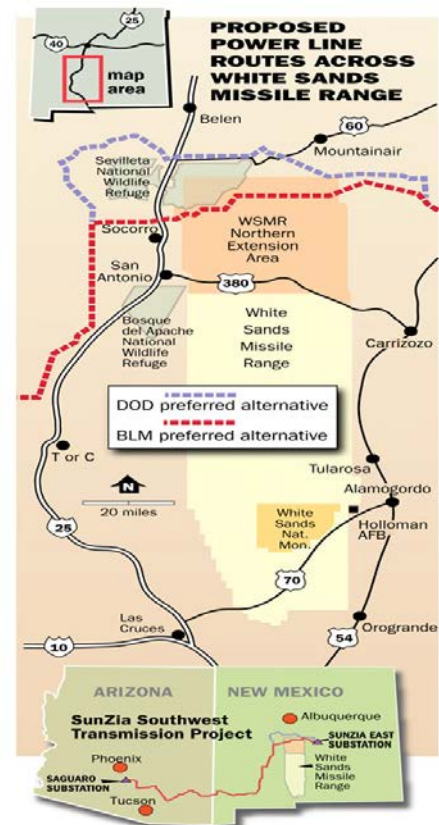
The Essentials

- The SunZia high-voltage transmission line project will span 500 miles over a portion of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), originating in NM and terminating in AZ.
- It is proposed by the SunZia Transmission LLC that the 500 kV line will provide increased transmission capacity for renewable energy projects.
- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) identified a preferred route for the SunZia line that partly passes close to the U.S. military’s White Sands Missile Range (WSMR).
- U.S. military officials oppose this preferred route and consider it a threat to national security.
- In October 2011, the Obama Administration designated the SunZia Project for accelerated permitting and construction through the Rapid Response Team for Transmission (RRTT) to encourage greater coordination between federal agencies.

Details of the Project

In 2008, a six-company partnership¹ known as SunZia Transmission LLC, proposed the SunZia Project to Southwest Area Transmission Planning Group (SWAT). SunZia consists of two bi-directional 500kV electric transmission lines and substations to transport energy from Arizona and New Mexico. This was in response to the 2004 New Mexico governor’s request to SWAT to propose a new line to export wind generated electricity from New Mexico.

SunZia will be a 500-mile-long high-voltage transmission system (either two single-circuit 500 kV AC or one single-circuit 500 kV AC and one single circuit 500 kV DC line) linking Lincoln County in New Mexico with Pinal County in southeastern Arizona. Its AC configuration is proposed to create 3,000 MW of transfer capacity, or 4,500 MW under the hybrid AC/DC option. Wind farms feeding the line could assist California in achieving its RPS targets through



SOURCE: SunZia, Directorate of Public Works
White Sands Missile Range

RUSS BALL / JOURNAL

¹SunZia's sponsors are the SouthWestern Power Group (SWPG), Shell Wind Energy, Tucson Electric Power, Salt River Project, Tri-State Generation and Transmission and Energy Capital Partners.

Fig. 1 Proposed power line routes across the White Sands Missile Range

transmission contracts. SunZia could also provide a transmission alternative that assists New Mexico and Arizona in meeting their RPS goals ².

The Cascabel Working Group (CWG), an organization concerned with the cultural and ecological integrity of the lower/middle San Pedro River Valley, commented on the SunZia Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Lawsuits have been raised in the Upper San Pedro River Valley regarding the issue of threat to protected species and habitats³. Additionally; they refer to documents which they believe indicate that SWPG's primary interest in proposing SunZia was to provide needed transmission capacity for its natural gas power plant, Bowie. They add that the omission of SWPG's need for SunZia in the DEIS is a central legal issue surrounding the project since SWPG hid its intentions and attempted to portray the line as a pure renewable energy project when it failed to attract investors⁴.

Concerns with the proposed routes

A proposed route crosses the Rio Grande, north of the Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, close to the San Antonio community. Environmental conservationists request that the line be routed to avoid the San Antonio/Rio Grande crossing. Also, both the Socorro and Sierra County Boards of Supervisors requested consideration of additional alternatives.⁵

The Black border on Fig.2 indicates SunZia's original Study Area Boundary. The Pink routes were proposed by BLM and SunZia. Routes 1, 1A, 2, 2A and 3 were proposed by New Mexico military bases and the study area was expanded to include these routes in the EIS evaluation.⁶One alternative route identified for consideration (Refer to Fig.1) is located along the western boundary and in the northwest corner of the White Sands Missile Range (WSMR). That route requires approximately 15 to 20 miles of new right of-way on military lands⁶.

²Evaluating the SunZia Transmission Line Proposal A Guide for Stakeholders and Decision Makers, www.sonoraninstitute.org

³Draft Environmental Impact Statement Contributions For Proposed SunZia Transmission Line Route: Traversing The Aravaipa Watershed And Lower San Pedro River Valley submitted by Friends of the Aravaipa Region & The Casabel Working Group, September 27, 2010.

⁴http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Information_Resources_Management/data_quality_2.P ar.61016.File.dat/Meader_Comments_8.20.pdf

⁵http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/nm/programs/more/lands_and_realty/sunzia/sunzia_docs. Par.20867.File.dat/Expanded%20Study%20Area%20Memo.pdf

⁶<http://www.abqjournal.com/main/2013/04/14/news/army-sunzia-line-proposal-a-threat-to-national-security.html>

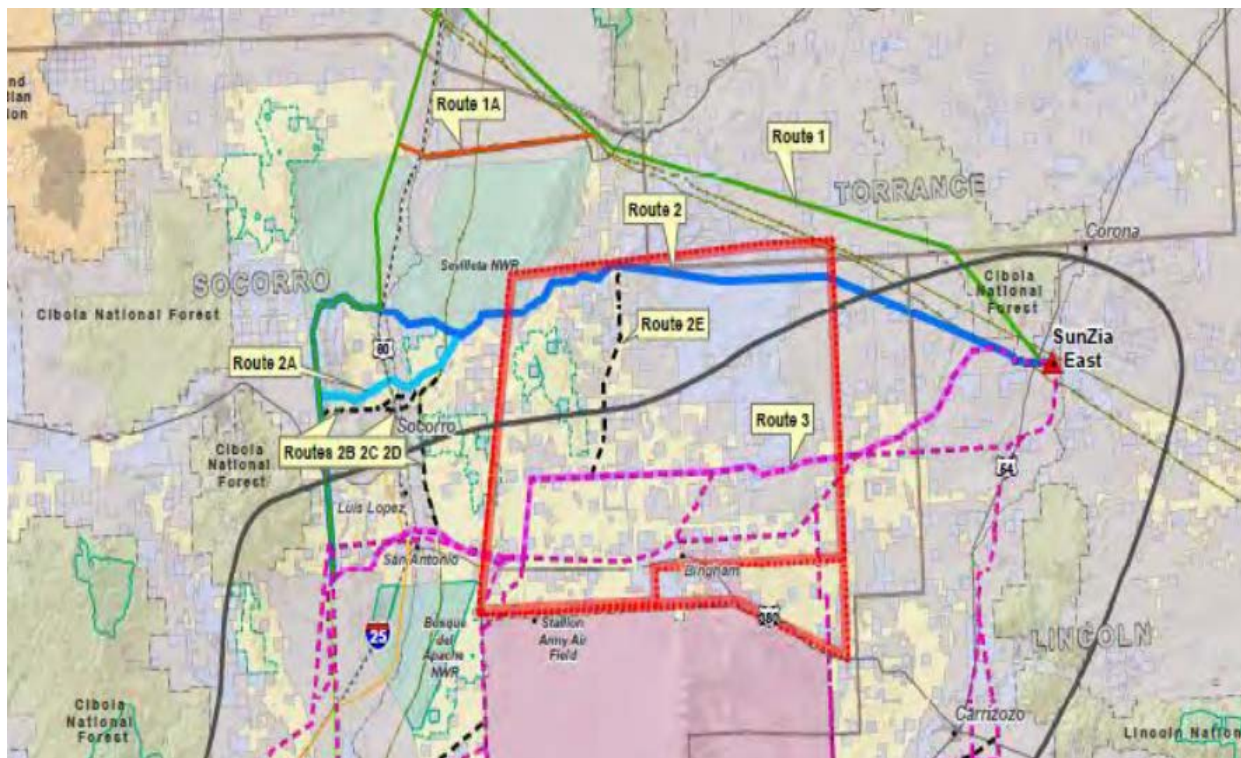


Fig.2 SunZia project map indicating route 2B and other alternatives proposed⁷. [Click here for alternative maps.](#)

A proposed transmission line route would stretch over an area outside the missile range proper called the White Sands northern extension, or “call-up,” area. The area is used for range operations when needed on a contract basis with private landowners. It is considered restricted airspace when it is in call-up status ⁶. U.S. military officials say part of the “preferred” route for this \$1 billion-plus high-voltage transmission project is a threat to national security⁶. The White Sands Missile Range (WSMR), Undersecretary of Defense Frank Kendall said, “...- no other location exists in the United States where it is possible to conduct flight tests of missile systems with these footprint [i.e. range area of operation] requirements ⁶.” If the preferred route is chosen, a state military planning group says it could lead to the shut down the White Sands Missile Range, which has an estimated annual economic impact of \$834 million⁶. BLM State Director Jesse Juen said Route 2B(In New Mexico), one of those suggested by DOD’s Kendall, was not pursued by the BLM because it has much less public land, more rugged terrain and more homes. The BLM expresses concern that the objections to the route across White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) could halt the project⁶.

⁷[http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/handouts/STTC_SunZia%20\(9-28-2010\).pdf](http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/handouts/STTC_SunZia%20(9-28-2010).pdf)

The creation of the Rapid Response Team for Transmission (RRTT)

In order to address the SunZia route disagreement and expedite transmission line development, the federal government added the SunZia project to a list of pilot projects supported by the Federal Rapid Response Team for Transmission (RRTT).⁸

Rapid Response Team for Transmission details:⁸

The RRTT aims to improve the overall quality and timeliness of electric transmission infrastructure permitting, review, and consultation by the federal government. This is done by:

- Coordinating statutory permitting, review, and consultation schedules and processes among involved Federal and state agencies through Integrated Federal Planning.
- Applying a uniform and consistent approach to consultations with Tribal governments; and,
- Resolving interagency conflicts and ensuring that all involved agencies are fully engaged and meeting timelines

Current Status

According to the latest SunZia Project newsletter (# 5, June 2013), the BLM will release the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendments (EIS) for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project in mid-June 2013.

However, the BLM's final determination on SunZia's alignment has not yet been made and there are alternate routes still under consideration⁹. [View detailed maps.](#)

Learn more

- WECC [latest update](#) (5/30/2013).
- The official homepage of the White Sands Missile Range, <http://www.wsmr.army.mil/Pages/Home.aspx>
- SunZia Transmission project moves forward
- <http://www.mmrgrp.com/index.php/news/sunzia-transmission-project-moves-forward/>
- SunZia Project Reports and Related Documents <http://nmeader.com/sunzia/#SWAT>
- http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/nm/programs/more/lands_and_realty/sunzia/sunzia_deis/sunzia_deis_volume.Par.22211.File.pdf/SunZia_DEIS_Volume_I_01.Executive.Summary.pdf
http://www.sunzia.net/presentation_pdfs/transmission_summit_west_2012_wray_10_23_12.pdf

⁸<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/interagency-rapid-response-team-for-transmission>.

⁹ http://www.sunzia.net/contact_us.php