

**July 6, 2021**

**BLACK FOREST PARTNERS' COMMENTS REGARDING THE IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVES, INFORMATION, ANALYSES, AND MITIGATION MEASURES RELEVANT TO THE PROPOSED ACTION TO PREPARE AN EIS AND RMP AMENDMENT FOR THE SUNZIA TRANSMISSION PROJECT ("SUNZIA").**

These comments are provided by Black Forest Partners, L.P. as the Managing Member of Southline Transmission, L.L.C. which owns the Southline Transmission Project ("Southline"). Southline may be impacted by the proposed SunZia amendments, therefore Southline has an interest in this process. Southline also has unique industry and geographic knowledge that may be helpful to the BLM and Cooperating Agencies in their assessment of alternatives.

The proposed SunZia revisions are substantial, and their impacts are not limited to the proposed scope of routing changes. More time is needed to adequately identify information, to assess impacts, and to provide alternatives for consideration. As such, a request for additional time for scoping was submitted June 29th. These additional July 6, 2021 comments are submitted despite the lack of adequate time, and are therefore preliminary, without many details that could help the agencies identify useful information, analysis and alternatives for consideration.

Black Forest is not an opponent of the SunZia project or its goals, and is supportive of the overall objective to find solutions to transport renewable energy from New Mexico. However, Black Forest believes there are solutions that could be implemented with much much lower impacts than either currently or previously proposed.

**New and Changed Information, Unanalyzed Impacts**

The proposed amendments for the SunZia Transmission Project present new and changed information which have important implications on the broader assessment of the project, its impacts and potential alternatives and mitigation.

**1) *Viability of Co-Location & Upgrades Should be Applied to Whole Project and Entire EIS***

Co-locating double circuit structures with existing transmission lines is an approach that was not considered in the original SunZia EIS. This approach is new and changed information that was not considered, but should have been. Co-location has the potential to meaningfully reduce impacts and avoid or mitigate controversial aspects of the proposed action. The original EIS should be examined with this new change to see if impacts on other areas of major concern could be lessened in Arizona as well as New Mexico. Additionally, alternatives involving the upgrade of existing lines (as opposed to co-locating new SunZia lines) should be considered as another viable option for consideration. Some proposed alternatives for consideration are summarized below, though there may be others which could not be further developed due to lack of adequate comment time.

*Northern Route Co-Location/Upgrade Alternatives* -- Examine existing lines headed north towards Four Corners that could be re-built, or upgraded, combined with lines exiting Four Corners that could be re-built or upgraded to meet the same proponent objectives with lower impact.

The 115kV line that is being considered for co-location south through the Sevilleta also runs north. An alternative that upgrades or co-locates that 115kV line north toward Belen and West Mesa should be examined. From West Mesa, there is an existing 230kV line towards Ambrosia to Four Corners that could be analyzed for co-location or upgrade. From Four Corners, there are different existing paths that could be explored for co-location. One path from Four Corners to Cholla to Saguaro would reach the same proposed connection point as the proposed action. Total mileage for this Northern Route Co-Location Alternative would be similar to the mileage of SunZia's proposed revised route, but 100% of that route could be built along, co-located or with upgraded existing transmission lines.

Another Northern Route Co-Location Alternative would be to similarly co-locate/upgrade to Four Corners, but then to co-locate/upgrade from Four Corners to Moenkopi and then to Marketplace, which would provide a direct connection to California markets. Again this alternative would be 100% along co-located or upgraded existing transmission lines.

The Northern Route Co-Location/Upgrade Alternatives would not only eliminate the large amount of new corridor impacts, but could eliminate having to impact the Sevilleta, the Military, the Cascabel area, and private landowners who might be impacted by the newly proposed routes around the Sevilleta.

*2) The SunZia proposal now indicates a DC line capable of 3,000MW would be built first, a change from prior indications capable of an AC line capable of 1,500MW would be built first.*

If the first line is capable of 3,000MW, this questions the need for the second line and/or suggests alternatives should be considered. Why grant two 500kV AC lines at 3,000 MW total with 400-1000 feet of new disturbance, when one 500kV DC line could transmit the same amount of MW at a fraction of the impact? Reducing the scope to one 500kV line would reduce impacts significantly, at a similar capability to two AC lines.

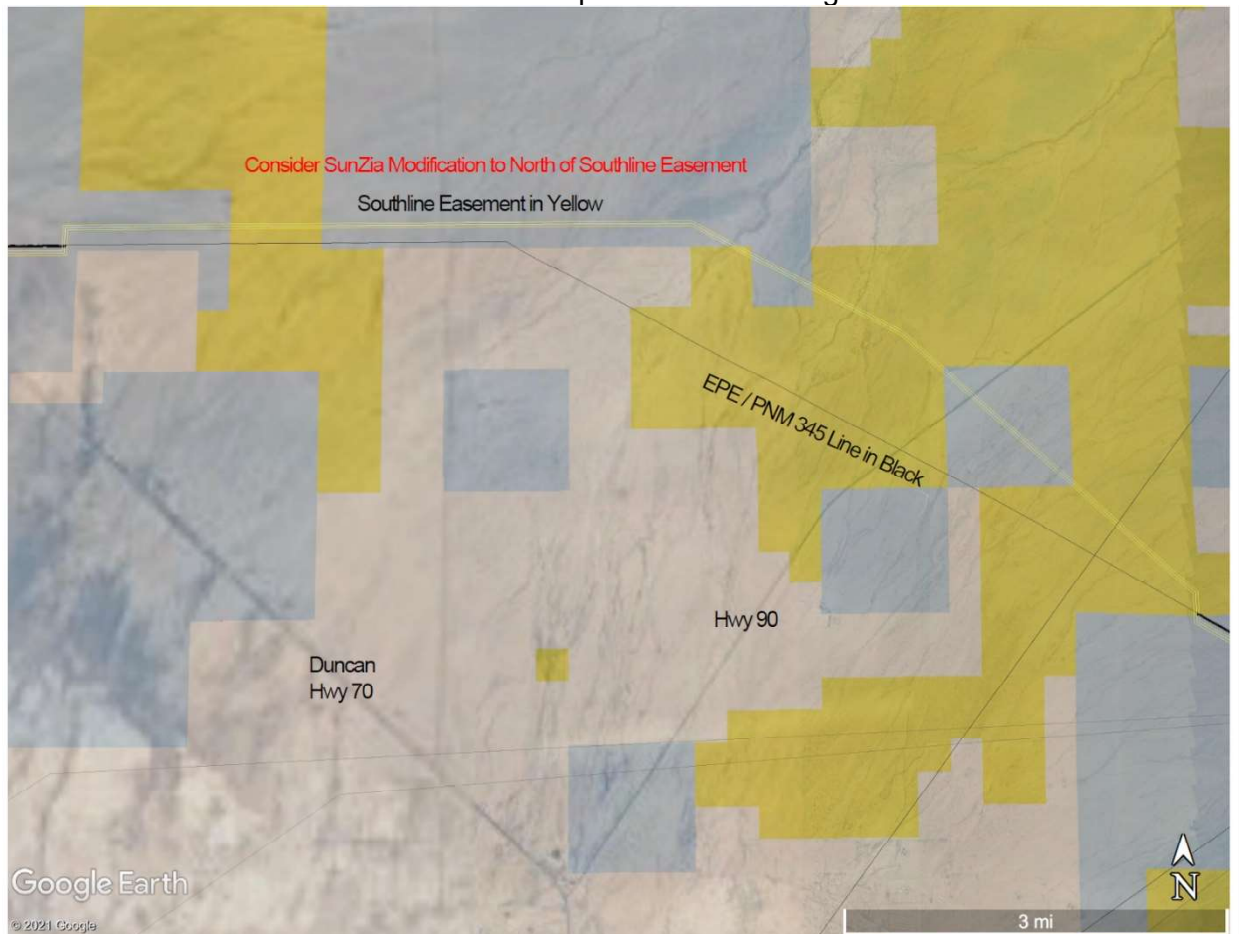
*3) Connection to AZ System Will Require Connected Actions Which Have Not Been Analyzed*

No public information has been released on interconnection or transmission service requirements for connecting the SunZia project to the Arizona system and delivering the electricity SunZia carries to end markets. The existing Arizona system cannot integrate/transmit 4500MW in the substation locations as proposed which will trigger new transmission that has not been assessed. The new proposed SunZia West connection will also trigger new connected action transmission to be built, and will therefore require a new process at the ACC. The new Arizona facilities need to be identified in the EIS process and included in impact analysis and be subject to proposer review and process, or else the EIS will be subject to legal challenge since clear connected actions were not analyzed.

#### 4) Mavericks Area

SunZia's proposed Route Modification 1--Mavericks Area is in Southline's corridor. The Southline Project has a NEPA ROD, has siting approval from the NMPRC, and has executed ROW agreements with NMSLO, while the SunZia project does not have NMPRC or NMSLO approval. In the NMPRC process and in discussions leading to NMSLO agreements, the Southline alignment in the Mavericks area was adjusted to mitigate landowner impacts. As Southline is in a more advanced stage, the proposed SunZia Mavericks adjustments should be coordinated to avoid crossings of Southline. Please ensure the SunZia alignment is kept north of Southline for the benefit of all parties including avoiding multiple crossings. Please see the map below for Southline's alignment. BLM consultant SWCA should have locations of the approved Southline alignment and we hereby authorize SWCA to use that data in this area to coordinate to make sure the SunZia alignment stays north of Southline.

Mavericks area map with Southline alignment

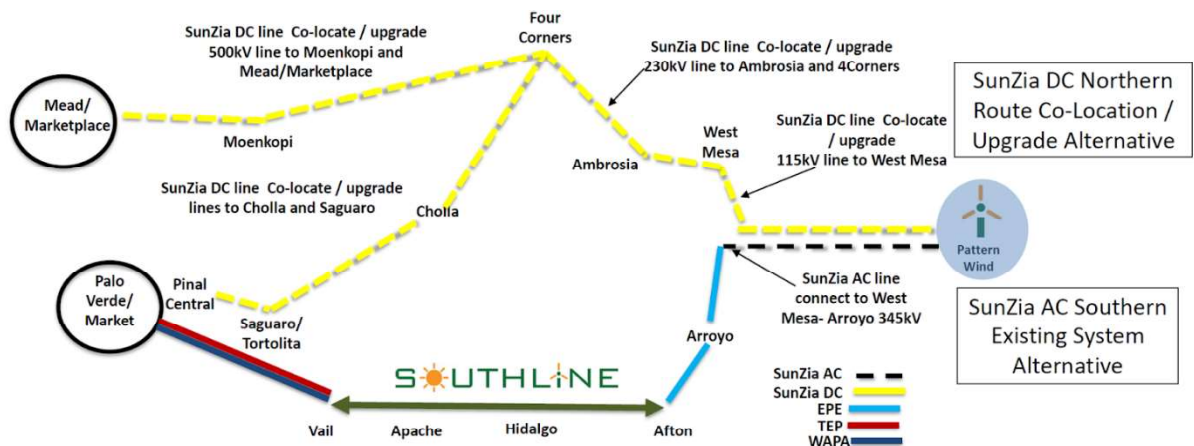


## 5) Cumulative Impacts

The original 2013 SunZia EIS did not include or analyze Southline as a reasonable foreseeable future action. Since the original 2013 SunZia EIS, Southline's permitting has advanced ahead of SunZia's with a NEPA ROD, NM State Siting approval, and NMSLO approval. Southline now needs to be included in the SunZia EIS analysis for Cumulative Impacts.

## 6) Coordination Opportunities

An alternative for the SunZia AC line should be considered from SunZia East to the point of intersection with the EPE 345 West Mesa-Arroyo line. But, instead of looking at co-location, an alternative of connecting to and upgrading the EPE line should be evaluated. This alternative could send power south to the EPE system (with associated station upgrades) and north to Four Corners. With coordination, and Southline in service, a path westward could be provided. This option would be the most schedule-ready alternative given Southline's status and the lower level of stakeholder concerns for the SunZia East to EPE line segment. This option would eliminate new expansions through the Seville area and minimize new routes impacting private landowners. Combined with a Northern Route Co-Location/Upgrade Alternative (outlined above, and in diagram below), these two coordinated options could enable a similar total amount of exports for NM, in a much much lower impact fashion, and likely a shorter timeframe.



- 1 AC Line -- Build SZ East to EPE line/existing system + Southline for 1,000 - 1,500MW.
- 1 DC Line -- Build Northern Co-Location/Upgrade Route for 3,000MW line to Four Corners and to AZ/CA.
  - Optimize Capacity, Minimize Impacts, Maximize Benefits
    - Achieves stated purpose of project, including capacity needs
    - No military impacts
    - No Cascabel impacts
    - Reduced Seville area impacts
    - No Santa Rita Ranch Area impacts
    - Leverages existing system and infrastructure investment
    - Reduces time to market

## Summary

The proposed modifications to the SunZia Project have introduced new, changed, unanalyzed information. Additional analysis and new alternatives need to be assessed in order to have a complete and defensible NEPA record. A No Action alternative is not an adequate option, because new information negates the original decision, and exposes that decision to legal and other regulatory challenges.

However, if this new process is done properly, there is the opportunity to maximize objectives while minimizing impacts.

Thank you for considering our comments. We are available for any questions or further information we can provide in the process.

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