

## White Sands Impediment to SunZia

The Department of Defense has at the last minute demanded a change in the New Mexican portion of the preferred route for SunZia north of the White Sands Missile Range, delaying the BLM's Record of Decision for the project. SunZia proposes to build two 500-kV transmission lines from central New Mexico to east Phoenix, following the San Pedro River Valley for 45 miles. Public comments on the SunZia Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) closed this past summer and BLM planned to finish the NEPA process by mid-September.

White Sands Missile Range is asking SunZia to follow a previously recommended route that the BLM dismissed without evaluation in the EIS. The route would be entirely new for more than 100 miles and would require an environmental review that could take 18 months or longer to complete, delaying the project further. SunZia has threatened that it will abandon the project if this is done,

after spending nearly \$40 million on the EIS.

New Mexico's politicians have entered the fray, taking opposite sides of the issue. Republican Governor Susana Martinez is supporting the White Sands Missile Range, asking that the lines be moved, as is New Mexico Republican Representative Steve Pearce. On the other side, Democratic Senator Martin Heinrich has written a staunchly pro-SunZia letter to Secretary of Interior Jewel asking that the Department of Defense be overridden and that the lines be routed as proposed. New Mexico Democratic Senator Tom Udall has taken a middle-of-the-road approach, requesting that President Obama help decide the issue and expedite the project.

In the midst of this, SunZia has obtained a letter of intent from First Wind to use up to 1,500 MW of capacity as an anchor tenant, though there is no binding power purchase

agreement from First Wind or any other utility at this time.

Meanwhile, Arizona's congressional delegation and media have been silent. Peter Else of the Friends of the Aravaipa Region and the Cascabel Working Group have urged Representatives Barber, Grijalva, and Kirkpatrick to inform Secretary Jewel and New Mexico's congressional delegation of Arizona's concerns, which they have yet to do. Senator Heinrich, often considered environmentally astute, appears entirely unaware of the conflicts in Arizona and has championed SunZia without regard for our state's interests. SunZia's greatest environmental impact occurs west of the San Pedro River in Congressman Barber's district, where Pima County has acquired three ranches and much of the private land in Buehman Canyon as a part of its Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. SunZia would bisect these ranches and cross the

SAN PEDRO RIVER VALLEY, LON & QUIETA



canyon, significantly damaging the county's investment.

Any legal action must wait until the SunZia-White Sands conflict is resolved and the BLM issues its Record of Decision. If the Department of Defense prevails, that will be a much longer time in coming.

*Mick Meader, Co-Chair,  
Cascabel Working Group*

## A New Process for Rosemont Review



AJ MONJES

A final decision by the Coronado National Forest on the proposed Rosemont Mine will likely be delayed until March 2014. Supervisor Jim Upchurch said the release of a final environmental impact statement for the proposed mine has been pushed back from September 27 to November because of "ongoing resolution of issues."

Once the Forest Service has published the final environmental impact statement, the 45-day objection period will begin, followed by 45-day review period, which can be extended an additional 30 days.

Concerns about the serious negative impacts on air quality, water resources and wildlife are likely to require all or most of the 120-day period for resolution.

An article by Tony Davis, *Rosemont's plans to restore waterways to make up for damage its mine causes* (Arizona Daily Star September 8, 2013), addressed issues around Rosemont's habitat mitigation plans. The goal of mitigation is to replace the functions and values of the habitats that the mine will degrade. The federal In Lieu Fee Mitigation program would require Rosemont to provide resources to a third party to restore or improve an area of degraded riparian habitat as close to the site of the damage as possible.

Sometimes the sheer scale of the damage to sensitive and important riparian areas is so huge that you have to scratch your head and ask, "Is it even possible to mitigate for this damage?"

Rosemont's proposed open-pit would stack 2.6 billion tons of mine waste above the Davidson Canyon and Cienega Creek drainages. This watershed provides one fifth of the groundwater recharged to the Tucson basin. Davidson Canyon and Cienega Creek are designated Outstanding Arizona Waters. There are only 22 such sites in our state. This designation comes with a "no degradation" standard. Many of

us question whether the proposed Rosemont Copper Mine project can meet this very strict standard.

We question if there is any mitigation that can come close to compensating our community for the anticipated permanent losses to our natural environment. Ultimately the question for us all becomes: Will this foreign-owned mine, which will likely export the ore it extracts and profits that it makes, bring benefits to our community that outweigh the devastation to our natural environment?

If state and federal agencies permit Rosemont's proposal, they need to be very certain that the mitigation will fully offset the mine's short- and long-term negative impacts. Tucson will have to live with the financial and quality of life consequences of their decision for countless generations after the mine is closed and its owners have moved on.

*Paul Green, Executive Director*

CIENEGA CREEK IN LAS CIENEGAS NCA, BLM

