



Hi-Desert Star

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Community celebrates Green Path North's demise

By Jutta Biggerstaff
For the Hi-Desert Star

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YUCCA VALLEY — To a standing ovation of applause and cheers Wednesday at the Yucca Valley Community Center, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power announced the department's decision to scrap Green Path North.

The proposed power project would have slashed a 118-mile swath through the desert to provide renewable electricity from geothermal, wind and solar sources from the Imperial Valley to L.A.

Locally, the 200-foot transmission towers would have cut through Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, Pipes Canyon Preserve and the hills along Old Woman Springs Road that wind through Yucca Mesa, Flamingo Heights, Landers and Johnson Valley.

"As of today, we have submitted two letters to the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw the right-of-way grant applications," said Mark Sedlacek, LADWP director of environmental affairs.

The capitulation by the energy giant capped a strenuous and passionate resistance from Hi-Desert residents.

April Sall, conservation director of the Wildlands Conservancy and founder of the California Desert Coalition, wiped away tears as she thanked the audience of dedicated volunteers and supporters for their efforts.

She called the three-year attempt to stop Green Path North an "emotional battle" and a lot of hard work, but said the outcome made the work worthwhile.

"If this project were to go forward, this landscape and these communities would be forever changed," she said. "This really is an incredible victory that speaks not only to community activism and grass-roots organizing, but to our local officials who really did come to bat for us."

Sall said she found out about the decision to scuttle Green Path North from LADWP General Manager David Freeman, who acknowledged the department had made some mistakes.

"He admitted that we managed to get about half the state ticked off at LADWP," she laughed.

Sall called Freeman a forward-thinking leader, and the California Desert Coalition is encouraged to hear some of his ideas.

"They are looking at Owens Dry Lake where they can re-purpose already disturbed lands and use existing transmission," she said. "Our position from the beginning has been there's a responsible way to do this."

Meg Foley, Morongo Valley community services director, said she was thrilled by the announcement.

"It's been a long, concerted effort, and we couldn't be happier with the outcome," she said. "We always believed we'd find a way to keep the route from going through here, but it's surprising to finally hear it and know it's official."

Seth Shteir, program coordinator for air and climate with the National Parks Conservation Association, said the decision to halt Green Path North is great because it will leave intact critical habitat in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve.

"I know about the importance of the habitat by reading about it, but I also know about it by bird-watching there on Saturday mornings," he said. "You just see incredible diversity of species, and it's wonderful that they've been able to protect it."

Sall summed up the Green Path North experience by giving credit to the people of the Morongo Basin who faced down a powerful adversary by the force of their conviction.

"We organized, and we had people who are very passionate about the land and their communities, and they rose to the occasion," she said. "It's been an inspiring experience."



Ruth Rieman and April Sall, leaders of the California Desert Coalition, embrace after the announcement that the L.A. Department of Water and Power has scrapped Green Path North.