

## DWP drops plan to build 85-mile power transmission line across the desert

*Environmental groups opposed the \$800-million Green Path North Transmission Line because it would have crossed wilderness preserves and scenic ridgelines.*



Pipes Canyon Wilderness Preserve would have been crossed by the Green Path North Transmission Line (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

By Louis Sahagun

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Facing enormous costs and fierce opposition from environmental groups, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power on Wednesday announced that it has dropped plans to build an 85-mile-long "green" power transmission line across desert wilderness preserves and scenic ridgelines.

Controversy surrounding the proposed Green Path North Transmission Line had tarnished Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's bid to portray himself as the leader of the "cleanest, greenest big city in America."

Villaraigosa was unavailable for comment. But interim DWP Chief S. David Freeman said the decision to pull the plug on the \$800-million project "was the practical thing to do. Essentially, the utility came up with the idea, and the mayor ended it."

"Why get into a fight with a Joshua tree when you don't really need to?" Freeman added with a laugh.

David Myers, Wildlands Conservancy executive director, lauded the decision.

"This was an ill-conceived project, and it was corrected," Myers said. "Los Angeles realized it didn't make sense to spend nearly \$1 billion on Green Path when the DWP already owns transmission lines throughout Southern California."

The DWP submitted a right-of-way grant application to the U.S. Forest Service in 2007 for the project, designed to bring electricity generated by solar, geothermal, wind and nuclear power to Los Angeles from the southeastern California deserts and Arizona.

Environmental and community groups were outraged by the DWP's plans to route high-voltage lines and 16-story towers through the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve north of Palm Springs, Pioneertown near Yucca Valley, Pipes Canyon Wilderness Preserve and a corner of the San Bernardino National Forest before linking with existing DWP power lines in Hesperia.

Home to bighorn sheep and chuckwallas, the preserves are internationally recognized birding hot spots embroidered with trails and streams that run under canopies of willow and cottonwood trees.

Opponents in the community of Oak Glen have inundated Los Angeles City Hall over the last three years with more than 50,000 e-mails, letters and postcards. The Wildlands Conservancy bought billboards on Interstate 10 that displayed scenic landscapes and a blunt message: "L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, it's not yours to destroy!"

Environmentalists celebrated the announcement Wednesday at events held in Oak Glen and Yucca Valley, where Joshua Tree resident and desert activist Elden Hughes said, "It's a huge victory, and the intelligent thing to do."

Freeman agreed and joked, "This decision should help in terms of billboard control because we hear the opponents are going to take down all those nasty signs along Interstate 10."

The announcement reflected a shift in policy toward developing renewable resources closer to the DWP's existing power corridors.

Freeman recently proposed construction of a gigantic array of photovoltaic cells over 80 square miles of the Owens Lake's dry lake bed and nearby flatlands that would generate up to 10% of all the power produced in California while simultaneously calming the region's fierce dust storms.

The Owens Lake project is key to Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's vow to end the city's use of coal-fired power by 2020. Villaraigosa also wants to use the lucrative contracts for the solar array as leverage to bring renewable-energy companies and new manufacturing jobs to Los Angeles.