

June 5, 2024

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, BORREGO SPRINGS COMMUNITY SPONSOR GROUP

\*\*\* REVISED MEETING AGENDA\*\*\*

Wednesday, June 5, 2024, 4:30 p.m.

In-person at the Borrego Library, 2850 Country Club Rd, Borrego Springs & also via Zoom

John Peterson is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

See attached link to the meeting

Topic: Borrego Springs Community Sponsor Group Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85997224811>

(You will be placed into a waiting room and then admitted to the meeting.)

THE PUBLIC IS ALWAYS WELCOME TO OUR MEETINGS

WE REPRESENT YOU WHEN ADVISING THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO ON LAND USE ISSUES

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR THE MEETING of May 1, 2024

C. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION (may be limited to 3 min): Opportunity for members of the public to speak to the Group on any subject matter within the Group's jurisdiction that is not on the posted agenda.

D. ACTION ITEMS: (Note that Non-action item number E-1 will be heard first.)

1. Membership within the Association of Planning Groups San Diego County. John Peterson presenting.

2. Review and comment letter regarding revisions to Board Policy I-1. This policy is up for review at the County and this is our opportunity to comment on potential changes to the Policy. The policy is attached to the agenda. **Sponsor Group members please review Board Policy I-1 prior to our June 5 meeting.**

E. NON-ACTION ITEMS:

1. Update regarding potential upgrades and expansion to power conveyance system through Borrego Valley. Presentation Bri Fordem and David Garmon.

2. Discussion regarding "Let's Go Borrego" which is through the Borrego Resource Center. Presentation by Martha Diechler

3. Report on the Grant Application for additional Solar expansion. Bill Berkeley presenting

F. GROUP BUSINESS:

1. Chair Report, status update on filling vacant seat #7

2. Summer schedule, next meeting set for September 18, 2024 **if needed**; otherwise the next regular meeting will be on October 2, 2024. **(Sponsor Group members please bring your calendars to discuss what our summer schedule is if a special session is needed.)**

3. Subcommittee Reports: None

4. Meeting Updates: None

5. Correspondence received: 1) email from Dalin Young SDG&E on status of microgrid updates and battery storage.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The next regular meeting is scheduled for October 2, 2024 at 4:30 at the Borrego Springs Library Community Room, 2850 Country Club Rd, Borrego Springs, California and via Zoom.

UPCOMING STANDING SUBCOMMITTEE MEETINGS:

The Chair has appointed the following BSCSG Members to serve as points of contact for the following areas:

a) Road Maintenance, Bill Haneline

b) Dark Sky Ordinance and issues, Rebecca Falk

Emails sent to the Chair at [petersonenv@hotmail.com](mailto:petersonenv@hotmail.com) will be forwarded to the appropriate person.

To sign up for County of San Diego email or text notices about various programs and topics that you can choose, visit: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/CASAND/subscriber/new?preferences=true#tab1> or search for the program at the county you want to find and scroll down to their email sign up link.

**If this Agenda is revised, a revised copy will be posted 72 or more hours prior to the meeting. The final Agenda may include additional Administrative or Non-Action items.** For further information and to be added to the Sponsor Group email list to receive agendas and agenda packets, contact the Chair at [petersonenv@hotmail.com](mailto:petersonenv@hotmail.com) . Address U.S. mail to: Community Sponsor Group, P.O. Box 1371, Borrego Springs, CA 92004-1371. For agendas, minutes and Community Plan, visit: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/pds/gpupdate/comm/borrego.html> .

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Borrego Springs Community Sponsor Group Members:

Chairperson: John Peterson Vice-Chairperson: Judy Haldeman, Secretary: Nancy McRae  
Members: Bill Berkley, Jim Dax, Bruce Durbin, Bill Haneline, Rebecca Falk, Seat #7 open.

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Standing Committees (with both Sponsor Group members and members of the public):

None

## **The Behemoth at our Doorstep**

J. David Garmon  
President, Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy

The specter of a towering 500 kV transmission line cutting in half the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park has haunted our region for the last two decades. Construction of such a line would be a disturbing, years-long proposition. The region's unsurpassed wilderness scenery and long uninterrupted views are the foundation of Borrego's destination economy. Such a 500 kV transmission line's negative economic impact on visitation to the town and Park has been calculated in the tens of millions of dollars. And residents of Borrego would receive no benefit from the completed line, but simply pay the economic and environmental price of its presence.

The Sunrise Powerlink was a close call, but the threat was averted when that line was sited south of the Park. Today there is a new threat. The powers that be are planning a new 500 kV line that would transect the Park, and it is on the verge of becoming a reality.

The forces behind today's threat dwarf the mere corporate greed that fueled the drive to build the Sunrise Powerlink. Today's threat is driven by California's urgent response to climate change, a dramatic shift in the regulatory environment, and politicians who are singing from the song book given to them by the investor-owned utility industry.

There are important actions that Borregans and those who love the Park can take, but first a description of the circumstances.

### ***California's Historic Response to Climate Change***

In 2019 the California legislature passed, and the governor signed, Senate Bill 100 requiring all electricity consumed in California in 2045 to be generated from renewable sources. This legislative mandate created an urgency among the regulatory agencies that are responsible for ensuring California has a reliable electricity grid now and in the future.

### ***A Shifting Regulatory Environment***

During the early 2000's when local residents struggled to keep the Sunrise Powerlink out of the Park, the three agencies responsible for ensuring that California has a reliable electric grid—the California Independent System Operator (ISO), the California Public Utility Commission (CPUC), and the California Energy Commission (CEC)—functioned largely independently. The CEC produced 10-year demand forecasts. The ISO used those forecasts to plan for the growth

and development of the grid, and the CPUC exercised its authority to give or withhold regulatory approval to proposed projects. Today is a different world.

In December 2022 the relationships among these three agencies shifted significantly when they signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) designed to “streamline” the siting and permitting of new grid infrastructure by removing much of the check and balance dynamic that previously existed. Section 9 of the MOU states, “The ISO transmission planning process will consider and incorporate the scenarios and portfolios developed by the CPUC with input from the CEC, and the subsequent CPUC siting/permitting process will then give substantial weight to project applications that are consistent with the ISO's final transmission plan.” (See full text of the MOU here: [bit.ly/4bK9GXH](https://bit.ly/4bK9GXH).)

### ***Implications for Borrego Springs and the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park***

In May 2023 the Board of Governors of the ISO approved its 2022-2023 Transmission Plan. This plan was created in coordination with the CPUC. The plan deals with transmission lines throughout the state, but of paramount importance to Borrego and the Park is the section affirming the need for a 500 kV line to run from southern Imperial County to northern San Diego County. This line is referred to as the Imperial Valley-North of SONGS 500 kV Line and is estimated to cost ratepayers \$2.3 billion dollars. SONGS is the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station located in northern San Diego County. (See full text of the plan here: [bit.ly/4bu1lrp](https://bit.ly/4bu1lrp).)

This new world of “coordination of activity” among regulatory agencies means that the ISO’s 2022-2023 Transmission Plan authorizing a 500 kV line from southern Imperial County to northern San Diego County was developed in conjunction with the CPUC and that the CPUC with its siting/permitting authority will give “substantial weight” to the project application when it eventually comes before the CPUC for final approval.

The simple translation of the MOU is, “The CPUC is now involved from the beginning in the ISO’s planning process for transmission lines, so when it comes time for the CPUC to approve those lines planned by the ISO, the CPUC will approve them. Quickly! And why not? The CPUC has been involved in the planning from the beginning.”

The upshot for Borrego and the State Park is that the Imperial Valley-North to SONGS Line is the largest, most expensive plan in the ISO’s 2022-2023 Transmission plan, and is very likely (“substantial weight”) to receive CPUC approval.

### ***Full Speed Ahead***

In the year since issuing its 2022-2023 Transmission Plan, the ISO has wasted no time in seeking a company to build the Imperial Valley-North of SONGS Line. On May 9, 2024, the ISO published a report detailing the selection process for the “Project Sponsor” that would build, own, manage, and operate the Imperial Valley-North of SONGS 500 kV Line. In an interesting

twist, SDG&E was not selected as the Project Sponsor. The firm selected is Horizon West Transmission, LLC. (See full text of the report here: [bit.ly/3V86lwi](http://bit.ly/3V86lwi).)

### ***The Route through the Park***

In its application submitted to the ISO, Horizon West described the route it will take in constructing the Imperial Valley-North of SONGS Line. "... its proposed route is approximately 135 miles along and it would acquire land rights from the BLM, DoD, California State Parks, and private landowners. Horizon West indicated that its proposed route would minimize impacts to the Anza Borrego Desert State Park by following a combination of existing transmission lines, existing roads, and other permanent impacts within the park for the majority of the crossing."

Currently, the only existing transmission line in the State Park is the 69kV line on wooden poles that is sufficiently innocuous to be barely visible as it traverses a path from the Narrows Substation to the Warner Substation. (See Map 1) A 500 kV line with its 180 - 200-foot-tall metal towers in the same easement as the existing 69 kV line would be visible from miles away. The footprint on the ground of such massive towers is the size of a house.

### ***AB 3238 - Circumventing CEQA***

For years Californians have been afforded the due process protections of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). As imperfect as it is, CEQA has been a hurdle that many environmentally destructive projects could not clear. CEQA has been the bane of unbridled development.

CEQA would be a challenging hurdle for the Imperial Valley-North of SONGS Line. However, a bill, AB 3238, now winding its way through the California Legislature would exempt the Imperial Valley- North of SONGS Line from CEQA. Section 2 of AB 3238 sponsored by Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella) "would, until January 1, 2035, exempt from CEQA projects for the expansion of an existing public right-of-way across state-owned land to accommodate the construction, expansion, modification, or update of electrical infrastructure, as defined." This section of the bill means that expanding the right-of-way of the existing 69 kV line through the State Park would be exempt from CEQA.

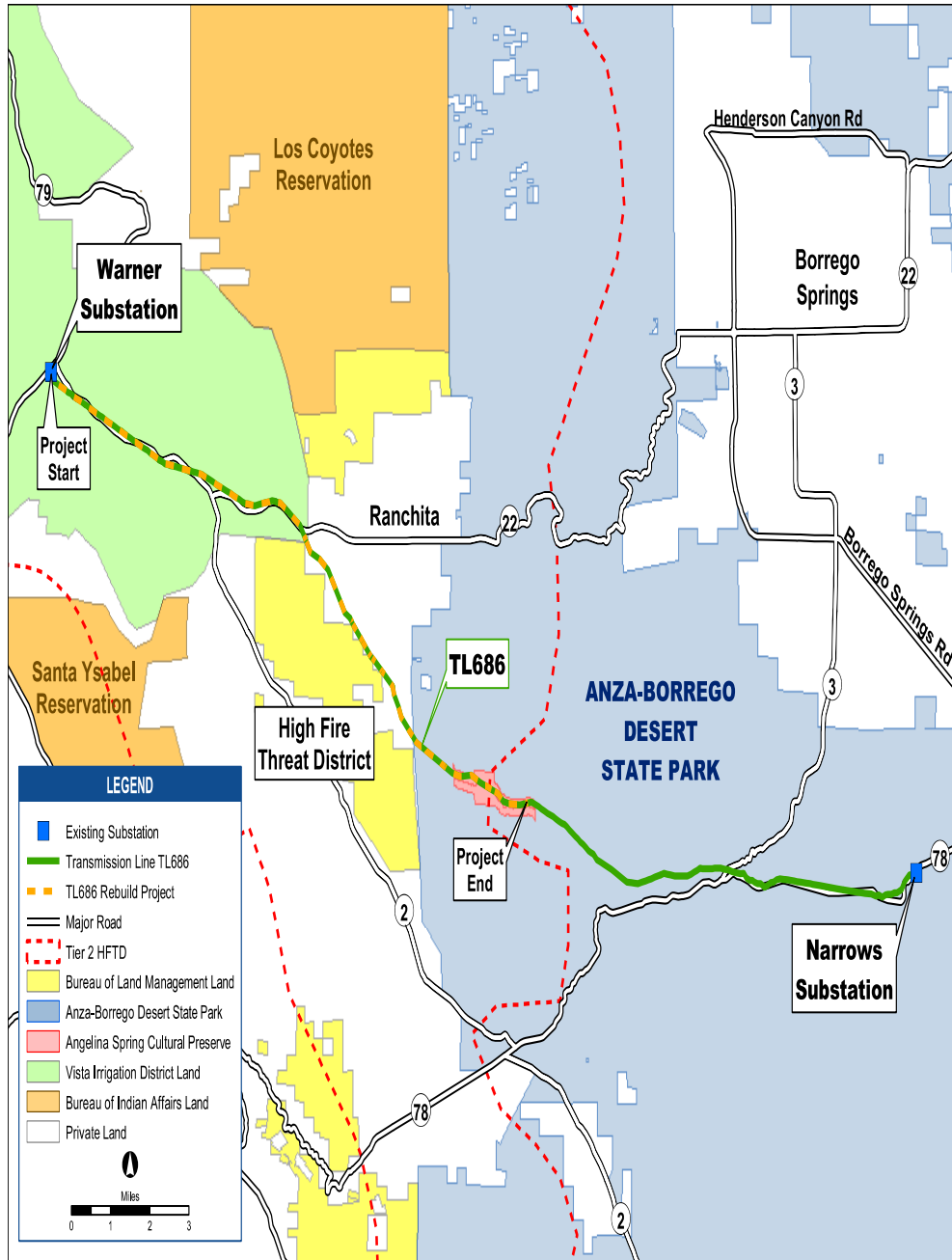
Remember the CPUC's new role in planning and approving transmission lines described above? AB 3238 would make full use of the CPUC's enhanced role to approve projects. Section 3 states, "This bill would vest the (California Public Utilities) commission with the ***exclusive power*** (emphasis added) to approve and site necessary electrical infrastructure projects, as defined. The bill would, except as provided, specify that the approval and siting by the (California Public Utilities) commission of a necessary electrical infrastructure project is in lieu of any approval, concurrence permit, certificate, or similar document required by any state, local, or regional agency, or federal agency to the extent permitted by the federal law, for the use of the site and related facilities." This section of the bill means the CPUC would have carte blanche to site a transmission line wherever it sees fit without regard to input from other public agencies such as the Department of Parks and Recreation or the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

### ***What you can do.***

What happens next is depends on what happens to AB 3238. If the bill is allowed to become law, CEQA protections would be gone and there would be little standing in the way of the CPUC, with its “exclusive power,” approving the route through the State Park for a 500 kV transmission line.

For those interested in participating in this political process, there are a number of things that can be done, beginning with contacting the elected officials listed below. The message to these individuals is not that we are opposed to renewable energy or California’s aggressive goals. But rather we are looking for ways to meet California’s renewable energy goals without destroying California’s public lands. One alternative is to maximize rooftop and parking lot solar in the urban areas along California’s coast. Studies have demonstrated such an approach would more than meet current and projected demand for electric power.

- 1) Alert your friends and neighbors to this imminent threat to Borrego Springs and the Park.
- 2) Call, and encourage others to contact, Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia’s office at (916) 319-2036 and voice opposition to his special interest bill (AB 3238) that would sacrifice the State Park.
- 3) Call, and encourage others to contact, the Governor’s office at (916) 445-2841 to voice your opposition to this proposed power grab (AB 3238) by the CPUC that dramatically diminishes all other voices and concerns.
- 4) Call, and encourage others to contact, Senator Brian Jones office at (916) 651-4040 and ask him to oppose AB 3238 when it comes up for a vote in the Senate.
- 5) Call, and encourage others to contact, Assemblywoman Marie Waldron at (916) 319-2075 and ask her to oppose AB 3238 when it comes up for a vote in the Assembly.
- 6) If your primary residence is in California but outside the districts of Assemblymembers Garcia and Waldron, and you are outside the Senate District of Senator Brian Jones, then please call your own State Assemblymember and State Senator, and encourage others to contact them as well, and ask your representatives to oppose AB 3238 when it comes up for a vote in the Assembly and Senate.



Map 1 – The existing 69 kV line is designated as Transmission Line TL686