United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
New Mexico State Office
P.O. Box 27115
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-0115
www.blm.gov/nm

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

IN REPLY REFER TO:

2800 (9320)
NM–114438
AZA-35058

May 11, 2012

Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your review and comment is the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for the proposed SunZia Southwest Transmission Project (Project) and accompanying plan amendments for several Bureau of Land Management (BLM) areas in New Mexico and Arizona. The BLM prepared this Draft EIS in consultation with cooperating agencies and in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ); and Department of the Interior regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508 for CEQ, 43 CFR Part 46 for the BLM, and BLM NEPA Handbook [H 1790-1]) to analyze the effects of authorizing the SunZia Transmission, LLC (Applicant) to construct and operate the proposed Project. The New Mexico State Office (NMSO) is the lead BLM office for this Project.

The Draft EIS analyzes the consequences of granting a right-of-way to SunZia Transmission, LLC (SunZia) for locating two 500-kilovolt (kV) electric transmission lines from the proposed SunZia East Substation in Lincoln County, New Mexico, to the Pinal Central Substation in Pinal County, Arizona. The proposed Project would include two new, single-circuit 500 kV transmission lines located adjacent to one another and would be located on BLM, state, private, and other lands. One of the proposed 500 kV transmission lines would be constructed and operated as an alternating current (AC) facility, and SunZia may construct and operate one of the proposed transmission lines as either AC or DC (direct current). The requested right-of-way width would typically be 400 feet, or up to 1,000 feet, depending on design variation with local conditions. Engineering studies would determine those requirements as part of the Project. In addition to the SunZia East Substation, three new substations would be constructed and operated at intermediate sites: the proposed Midpoint Substation, near Deming, New Mexico in Luna County; the proposed Lordsburg Substation near Lordsburg, New Mexico in Hidalgo County; and the proposed Willow-500 kV Substation, near Wilcox, Arizona in Graham County.

The lengths of various alternative routes considered and evaluated in the Draft EIS range between approximately 460 miles and 530 miles; the length of the BLM preferred alternative would be approximately 530 miles. It is estimated that approximately 191 miles, or 36 percent of the right-of-way for the BLM preferred alternative, would be located on federally administered lands in New Mexico and Arizona. To the extent feasible, the proposed route would use existing transmission line corridors and designated utility corridors located on federal land. Once constructed, the Project would be in operation year-round, transporting electrical power to major substation hubs in New Mexico and Arizona.

The Draft EIS is not a decision document. Rather, its purpose is to inform the public and interested parties of impacts associated with implementing the Proponent's proposal as associated with granting a right-of-way to construct, operate, and maintain the transmission line and associated facilities across federal lands. This Draft EIS also provides information to other regulatory agencies, for use in their decision-making processes, for other permits required for implementation of the Project.

The Draft EIS is now available for public review. The BLM NMSO requests that comments be structured so that they are meaningful, and alert the agencies to a reviewer's position and contentions. In order to be considered in the Final EIS, written comments on the Draft EIS must be received within 90 days after the Environmental Protection Agency's publication in the Federal Register of a Notice of Availability (NOA) of this Draft EIS. The BLM will consider timely filed comments and respond to them in the Final EIS. The BLM will host public meetings to discuss the Draft EIS and take comments on the proposed Project and the Draft EIS. Dates, times, and locations of these meetings will be announced in newsletters and local news media, and posted on the BLM project website at http://www.blm.gov/nm/sunzia.

The Draft EIS and supporting documents are available electronically on the BLM project website, and are also available for public inspection during normal business hours at the following locations:

- Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Office, 301 Dinosaur Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87508-1560
- Bureau of Land Management, Las Cruces District Office, 1800 Marquess Street, Las Cruces, NM 88005-3370
- Bureau of Land Management, Socorro Field Office, 901 S. Highway 85, Socorro, NM 87801-4168
- Bureau of Land Management, Roswell Field Office, 2909 W. Second Street, Roswell, NM 88201-2019
- Bureau of Land Management, Rio Puerco Field Office, 435 Montano N.E., Albuquerque, NM 87107-4935
- Bureau of Land Management, Safford Field Office, 711 14th Avenue, Safford, AZ 85546-3337
- Bureau of Land Management, Gila District Office, 1763 Paseo San Luis, Sierra Vista, AZ 85635-4611
- Bureau of Land Management, Tucson Field Office, 3201 East Universal Way, Tucson, AZ 85756
- Bureau of Land Management, Arizona State Office, One North Central Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85004-4427
- Arizona State Land Department, 1616 West Adams, Phoenix, AZ 85007-2614
- Arizona Fish and Game Department, 5000 West Carefree Highway, Phoenix, AZ 85086-5000
- New Mexico State Land Office, 310 Old Santa Fe Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87504-1148

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Regulatory Division, 4101 Jefferson Plaza, N.E., Albuquerque, NM 87109-3435
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, 500 Gold Avenue S.W., Albuquerque, NM 87102-3118

A limited number of copies of the document will be available, as supplies last. To request a copy, contact Adrian Garcia, Project Manager, New Mexico State Office, 301 Dinosaur Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87508-1560.

Written comments may be submitted by the following methods:

Website: http://www.blm.gov/nm/sunzia
Email: NMSunZiaProject@blm.gov
Mail: Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Office, re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, PO Box 27115, Santa Fe, NM 87502-0115.
Courier or Hand Deliver: Bureau of Land Management, SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, 301 Dinosaur Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87508

Substantive comments received during the 90-day period following publication of the NOA will be considered prior to a decision on the Proposed Action. Comments on the Draft EIS should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if the comments refer to chapters, headings, and pages of the Draft EIS. Comments may address the adequacy of specific analyses in the Draft EIS and the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the document (refer to CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1503.3).

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or any other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment that your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, the BLM cannot guarantee that it will be able to do so.

If you have any questions regarding the NEPA process used to prepare the Draft EIS or need additional information regarding the Project, please contact Adrian Garcia, Project Manager, c/o Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Office, 301 Dinosaur Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87508, or by telephone at (505) 954-2000. Any persons wishing to be added to a mailing list of interested parties may write or call the Project manager at this address or phone number.

Sincerely,

for Jesse Juen
State Director