

# Utility corridor discussion causes static

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Different routes for a power corridor which would run through Henderson were discussed during a Resource Management Plan informational meeting Wednesday at the Convention Center.

The audience of 60 people consisted of representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, power companies, Henderson, homeowners associations and other interested individuals.

Jerry Wickstrom, planning/environmental coordinator for BLM, said they started discussing corridors in January 1990 because of federal government requirements.

"The intent is to concentrate the big utilities into corridors and not scatter them across the countryside. If you go through the countryside with smaller corridors you

actually impact more area because of the lines."

During the 1990 study, the BLM highlighted several alternatives which would bring power from Idaho and Utah to California. Of the five original alternatives, some adversely impacted Henderson by widening the existing corridor up to three miles. In some areas, the three-mile-wide corridor would have overlapped some existing homes.

Wickstrom said the major issue in Henderson was that the corridor didn't connect with the north and south sides. Since then, the BLM has studied the proposals more closely and has created a supplement, Alternative E.

Originally all the lines came from Hoover Dam and tied into the Mead Substation. But a network between government and private power companies has

created the need for the expanded utility corridor.

The utility corridor would be the power grid for anything southwest of the Columbia River, Wickstrom said. It would only be used for electrical power and not any other utility.

The general area for the utility corridor in the Las Vegas Valley runs from Sunrise Mountain south toward the River Mountains in Henderson then across U.S. 93/95 near Railroad Pass through the McCullough Mountain Range and southwest into California.

Boulder City nominated the center of the River Mountains as an area of critical environmental concern (ACEC) and Henderson agreed to the nomination.

An ACEC designation is an area that deserves special management for any one of several reasons including archaeological, scenic

or endangered species. The River Mountain area is one of the biggest areas for transplanting desert bighorn sheep.

## Alternative E

Hedging on which alternative the BLM is currently recommending, Wickstrom said, Alternative E is approaching the preferred alternative. When an alternative is selected, a protest period will follow and Wickstrom predicts it will be sometime next year before a final decision is made.

Within the Alternative E utility corridor, three options have been proposed. Some include a total of eight utility lines running through the corridor. Each line would be separated by 200 feet and the overall corridor width would be

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1,400 feet, Wickstrom said.

Option AB in the Alternative E plan has the biggest impact on some residents in Henderson. If chosen, Alternative AB would run as close as 300 feet from some residents in the Calico Ridge neighborhood. Wickstrom said the corridor would not get any closer to the existing lines but the corridor could become more dense with up to eight power lines running through it.

In addition, AB would affect some residents south of Lake Mead Drive, he said. "Some houses appear to be closer [to the corridor] than Calico Ridge residents."

## Residents voice opinions

Resident Debbie Christensen preferred Option "C" because it moves the corridor farther east over the mountain range toward Lake Las Vegas. She asked why BLM would choose Options "A" or "B" which will place the corridor near existing homes in the Foothills or River Mountain neighborhoods instead of putting it in Option "C" where no homes are built.

Wickstrom said the Lake Las Vegas area is much more mountainous and would be more costly to build a corridor. He added that parts of Option "C" lie within National Park Service boundaries and he felt they would not allow for a utility corridor.

Resident Diane Booker cautioned the BLM about a flood problem in the area. She suggested a channel be included as part of the corridor.

Bob Maichle recommended staying in the existing corridor and building lines next to it. He also recommended the power companies pay the cost to build

the new lines.

Norma Cox said the power companies should pay any damages incurred by residents from the corridor. In the 1970s, Clark County was able to extract \$1.3 million from power companies wishing to build an utility corridor, she said. The money is to be used to restore the Las Vegas Wash and create a desert wetland park.

Randy Harness said he had several environmental concerns. He said it would be a dangerous precedent to allow a utility corridor through a Wilderness Study Area (Rainbow Gardens which is near Sunrise Mountain).

Wickstrom said only Congress can pass a corridor through a Wilderness Study area. He added that some power companies wanted a mile-wide corridor through WSA and the BLM has cut it down to 1,400 feet.

Christensen said she was worried about the health effects of living near power lines. "How close can you live and still be safe near a power line. I ride my horse out there and I've gotten shocked."

Wickstrom could not give a definitive answer and was hoping to rely on the power company officials in the audience. But the representatives remained silent.

The only time the power company officials spoke was to tell Wickstrom that the engineering design of the corridor should be left to the power companies, not the BLM.

Another public input meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Cashman Field in Rooms 203 and 206.

Anyone who cannot attend the meeting can send comments to the BLM before Aug. 19.