

John L. Marshall

ATTORNEY AT LAW

570 Marsh Avenue
RENO, NV 89509

Telephone:
(775) 303-4882

johnmarshall@charter.net

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VIA ELECTRONIC & U.S. MAIL

William A. Dunkelberger, Forest Supervisor
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
1200 Franklin Way
Sparks, Nevada 89431

Re: Draft EIS for Bordertown to California 120 kV Transmission Line #36656

Dear Ms. Higgins:

On behalf of Michael and Shernaaz Webster, please consider the following comments on the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA") Draft Environmental Impact Statement ("EIS") for the proposed Bordertown to California 120 kV Transmission Line ("Transmission Project") #36656. The Webster live and own property in Verdi, Nevada and California, including an undeveloped parcel in Dog Creek canyon. The Websters regularly recreate in the vicinity of, and will be directly affected by, several of the alternatives routes of the Transmission Project.

Of the alternatives evaluated the Websters strongly support the decision of the Forest Service to adopt the Poeville alternative as the preferred route for the proposed Bordertown to California transmission line, for the following reasons:

1. **Forest Service Priorities.** As noted in the DEIS, the Poeville route is the only alternative considered that is consistent with Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest Plan specifying that "the first priority will be to utilize existing corridors." The remaining 3 alternatives all would require extensive construction of new corridors and consequent extensive destruction of the forest. The Poeville alternative minimizes new environmental damage by following corridors where the environmental damage has already been done.

2. **Protecting the Forest.** The Forest Service should give much higher priority to preserving and protecting the forest than to accommodating the business interests of a for-

profit company. Power lines can be moved, but once the forest is lost the damage is irreparable. Thus any potential additional costs to NV Energy of the Poeville route should carry little weight compared to the environmental costs to our dwindling natural resources. The Poeville route traverses the smallest distance through the national forest and thus by this criterion alone clearly has the least impact on the forest.

3. **Ecosystems.** As the most eastward route the Poeville alternative passes through the least amount of actual forested land and thus its construction will presumably have the least impact on vegetation and wildlife. The alternative routes instead pass through heavily wooded areas that would necessarily suffer much more extensive impact and vegetation loss if a corridor were constructed.

4. **Use of Existing Utility Corridors.** At a Verdi Advisory Board meeting it was noted that the existing Poeville line already includes actual lines or space for lines that are currently not in use, and thus could potentially be used for this project without the need to construct new lines. This further suggests that the Poeville route will have much less impact than adding an entirely new route that will pass through large tracts of Forest Service land.

5. **Fire Risk.** Of the alternatives considered, the Poeville route offers the best access and least fuel in the event of a fire. The Caughlin Ranch fire of 2011 made it evident that power lines present a real fire risk. Fighting the Caughlin fire was difficult, and will be many times more difficult along the routes that are much more heavily forested. In particular, near Verdi, the Peavine route runs through regions with dense growth with minimal access roads. The Forest Service recently developed a long-term plan for fire mitigation in the Dog Valley area. At their presentation of this plan in Verdi, it was noted that the Dog Creek Canyon was not included in the plan because the canyon is steep and inaccessible. The Peavine route traverses this canyon and thus runs through parts of the forest that the Forest Service had already decided were too difficult to address for fire concerns. The Peavine route therefore combines some of the worst access and highest fuel density in the area. Moreover, these problems are in areas that are very close to homes and private property in Verdi, and to areas where homes have been lost to past forest fires such as the Crystal Peak fire of 1994.

6. **Potential for New Roads and Encroachments.** Construction of the power line along new routes - in particular the Peavine and Peavine/Poeville alternatives - will necessarily create new roads and access points into the forest which will promote encroachments by off road vehicles and hunters. In turn this will lead to increased fire risk and potential poaching and trapping, as well as increased trespassing on private lands adjacent to the forest.



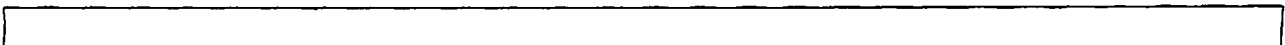
7. **Wildlife Impact.** The Dog Creek canyon is one of the most pristine regions of the Dog Valley area because of poor access, and a unique ecosystem because of the year-round creek. Such creeks are a rarity in the area, and Dog Creek supports an abundant variety of wildlife. The Forest Service should make preservation of this ecosystem a very high priority. The Peavine alternative runs directly over the creek in a steep and heavily wooded area. Construction of this route would introduce erosion, non-native species, and increased human traffic along the creek, including hunting, fishing, and trapping, and thus will adversely impact the flora and fauna.

8. **Cultural Impact.** Dog Creek canyon also includes the remnants of the rail line of the Verdi Lumber Co, including many extant stone tressel foundations and walls. The designated Peavine route runs directly over a rail foundation and thus will degrade and visually impact these sites.

9. **General Visual Impact.** The proposed Peavine route will run very close to and bisect existing neighborhoods in Verdi, and run perpendicular to the canyons in Verdi so that the lines will be at a high elevation. It will pass through hills that are visible from miles away throughout long stretches of the Highway 80 corridor. It will be visible up close from nearly every location in Verdi. The scars they will create will thus impact nearly all of the residents of Verdi.

10. **Future Development.** NV Energy is likely to expand on any routes developed under the present action. In an article in the January 2, 2012 issue of the Reno Gazette, a spokesperson for NV Energy noted that the power line will allow additional growth in the western Reno and Verdi areas. In addition, NV Energy appears to view the line as facilitating wind and solar generation projects in the Bordertown area. Thus the Forest Service needs to consider not only the impact of the current proposal but the broader long term impact, on the area and the forest, of the development the line will promote. In particular, adding a new corridor now will open this corridor to further expansion in the future under the pretext that this corridor now meets the Forest Service Plan of "utilizing existing corridors." Once a new line is permitted along the Peavine, Mitchell, or Peavine/Poeville routes, it will likely become NV Energy's preferred route for future expansion. As these routes are expanded with additional lines, poles, and construction, the negative effects on the forest will continue to expand.

11. **End Users.** Most of the power needs are not in Verdi but to the east in Reno and far removed from Verdi. Future development may lead to building a new substation closer to Reno. The Poeville route remains closest to the population center and thus to future potential changes in the power grid. The remaining alternatives instead require traversing miles of forest to reach a substation that is miles from the center of power consumption.



12. **Multi-state regulatory requirements of multiple agencies.** The Poeville alternative has the advantage that all new corridors will remain in Nevada. The 3 alternatives all involve major new corridors within the state of California. NV Energy must also obtain necessary permits from the California Public Utilities Commission ("CPUC") and the California Department of Fish and Game ("DFG"). See NV Energy Study, at 28-29. As a result of these discretionary approvals, the CPUC and DFG will have to undertake extensive analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") of the transmission line. It is unclear from the report and NV Energy Study how the Forest Service and these California agencies intend to coordinate the CEQA and NEPA analysis, particularly when consideration by these agencies and their obligations under CEQA may impose greater constraints on the alternatives selected by NV Energy for study. Moreover, it may be that California agencies may choose a different set of alternatives than included in the present analysis or arrive at different conclusions regarding the significance of impacts and mitigation requirements. Since these decisions may drive the ultimate feasibility and/or preference of various alternatives, the Forest Service should consider whether it could arrive at a fully informed decision absent vital input from the CEQA process.

The Websters appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft EIS the Transmission Line and hope that you consider these comments. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



John L. Marshall
Attorney for Michael and Shernaaz Webster

