

LADWP Passes Blame for Power Line Survey Markers to BLM

"Survey markers were put down as a result of the requirements of BLM and were there to establish boundaries of wilderness areas in order to avoid them"

- David Nahai, LADWP CEO and General Manager

In a March 26 interview with CBS 2 News of Palm Springs, David Nahai gave the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's explanation of why this Los Angeles utility has installed survey markers on private property and in wilderness areas of the Southern California desert for a planned new LADWP energy corridor that bears the name Green Path North.

LADWP CEO and General Manager David Nahai seemed to be attempting to allay the fears of irate desert residents and environmentalists when he stated that "Survey markers were put down as a result of the requirements of BLM and were there to establish boundaries of wilderness areas in order to avoid them." However, this statement seems to fly in the face of reality and only adds further fuel to the ire of citizens in affected communities according to Ruth Rieman, spokesperson for the California Desert Coalition. To those concerned with the environmentally destructive nature of the proposed power line route and with its devastating affect on rural communities, this is just the latest misstatement by LADWP in its attempt to avoid any transparency in the utility company's planning.

Residents along the proposed Green Path North route, an 85-mile path of high transmission power lines that would run from Desert Hot Springs to Hesperia, first found the survey markers popping up on their property in April 2007. A Johnson Valley resident was particularly shocked when an LADWP helicopter and survey crew landed adjacent to his property to install one of the now infamous markers. Responding to citizen concern about the markers, Bruce Davis, chief of staff for San Bernardino County Supervisor Dennis Hansberger, contacted the LADWP, whose representative denied that any of the survey markers were theirs.

It is not only residential property that has been the target of LADWP survey crews, as many of the ten survey markers found to date have been placed on public lands in pristine desert areas. Disturbing to David Miller, President of the Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, are those markers that have appeared on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land deep in the heart of the preserve, an area of protected land that has been designated an area of critical environmental concern (ACEC). Miller is particularly mystified by Nahai's statement to CBS, because BLM personnel responsible for management of the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve had indicated to him that they were surprised by and unaware of LADWP's placement of survey markers within the preserve. Further, that Nahai would indicate the markers have been placed to "establish boundaries of wilderness areas in order to avoid them" begs the question, "Why have markers been set deep within a wildlife preserve?"

The California Desert Coalition, www.cadesertco.org, has brought together every community along the proposed route of Green Path North, as well as environmental groups and the communities' elected representatives. Resolutions in opposition to establishing this new power line corridor have been passed by cities and community organizations all along the route, as well as by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors. The Sierra Club has offered to work with the Board of Supervisors in opposing Green Path North. U.S. Representative Jerry Lewis has written to the LADWP opposing the route. Speaking to concerns for the power lines' impact on Joshua Tree National Park, the National Parks Conservation Association has written to Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa citing the "potentially catastrophic ecological consequences" of the power lines.

A primary accusation against Green Path North is that the project is more about greed than green. There are alternatives, such as conservation, locally generated renewable energy, and use of existing transmission corridors, that the LADWP could pursue rather than digging, bulldozing and blasting a new path through protected wildlands. As Rieman says, "We could sacrifice the Mojave Desert, spoil it and not save the globe with some really bad projects."