

On May 4, I wrote to Ms Heidi Duron and Mr David Prusch on behalf of the entire Scenic 247 Committee.

Karen Watkins, our contact in County Land Use Services, had informed us at the time of her surprising early retirement that they would be our contacts as the campaign for State Scenic Highway status goes forward. As you may imagine, our committee members who have volunteered so many hours in research and development for the County were distressed at not hearing from anyone in LUS.

After our well-received presentation last December at the Planning Commission meeting, Karen said the next steps would be:

- 1) Land Use Services to complete the public input process and finalize the Corridor Protection Plan (approx. 30 days)
- 2) Agendize the Corridor Protection Plan for Board of Supervisors' approval, and send the Letter of Intent to Caltrans (goal - Jan 25th BOS meeting)
- 3) Caltrans stamp of approval (February)

As Jim reported to HVCC, Jamal Elsaleh, Caltrans Deputy of Design, attended that December meeting to support our efforts.

Almabeth Anderson, Caltrans Landscape Architect, said she would present and recommend the proposal to their District Director, Michael Beauchamp, who then would do the same to the State Director in Sacramento.

BUT, after all this encouragement, we were faced with a last-minute requirement to get a "buy-in" from the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, the Military, and the California State Lands Commission, that they would agree to abide by the Corridor Protection Plan.

Having heard nothing since then from Land Use Services, I began trying to make contact with the Federal agencies.

Of course, I had NO official request for these agencies. Still, I explained that, as the County has jurisdiction over very little of the area traversed by the highway, I believed Caltrans was asking for their cooperation.

I also had drafted a letter for the California State Lands Commission but had no contact names.

Replies over the months have been encouraging, and I just reported them in a letter to the County Land Use Services folks.

BLM:

The majority of the 247 Scenic Corridor lies within public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

Our friend Katrina Symons has recently retired, but I heard from Jeffery Childers, Acting Field Manager in the Barstow Office, who said he had not been briefed on Scenic 247 by the County.

He told me their designated "Areas of Critical Environmental Concern" contain some of the highest protections available to public lands, and requested an official draft of the County's "buy-in" agreement to review.

The Marine Base:

First, a phone call with Ms Erin Adam, G-5 Community Liaison. She feels time is of the essence, that development on the highway or near Base boundaries is a matter of great importance to the Base, in consideration of the deployment of military vehicles.

My impression: they would strongly support the existing Federal environmental *and* recreational protections for the Scenic Corridor.

Ms. Adam had heard nothing from Land Use Services about Scenic 247. She logged on to the website and sounds very positive about the Scenic 247 mission!

Michael King, Encroachment Specialist, phoned for a follow-up interview, requesting additional details on the Scenic 247 campaign, to brief the Base command.

USFS:

On April 7, I received an e-mail reply from Zach Behrens, Public Affairs Officer, San Bernardino National Forest: "I believe most of the views of the San Bernardino Mountains, save for the tippy top, are going to be BLM. The good news is I have a colleague who works for both BLM and the Forest Service in this area. Jihadda Govan, CC'd here, is the Sand to Snow National Monument Manager, which I believe covers the area you are looking at."

SLC:

A very enlightening conversation with Sarah Mongano, Senior Environmental Scientist, Division of Environmental Planning and Management, California

State Lands Commission (thanks to Chuck Bell for suggesting this contact!)

First, she said the BLM-State Lands Commission School Lands exchange plan announced in October 2015 never was finalized.

I quote, "...the BLM/CSLC land swap plans did not result in any actual swaps of parcels. Also, the Stagecoach Solar Project EIR is still on hold at the request of the applicant."

This consolidation was touted to "promote continuity of wilderness and wildlife corridors while supporting renewable energy goals." Highly unlikely in my opinion, given the Development Focus Areas established by the controversial DRECP within the Scenic Corridor.

Since the land exchanges never occurred, very few parcels of School Lands lie in the S.R.247 scenic corridor. I cannot guess SLC response to an agreement document to abide by 247 CPP, but our contact Sarah Mongano now is familiar with our campaign.

Three major drawbacks for the Stagecoach Solar project were discussed:

- 1) Comments on the Draft EIR pointing out Caltrans protection of corridors *eligible* for State Scenic Highway status.
- 2) the impossibility of conforming to Caltrans requirements for undergrounding transmission in the limited spaces available.
- 3) SLC lacking jurisdiction over the site.

FYI: The Stagecoach Solar project was planned in largely-undeveloped scenery, in view for miles, through which the historic Lucerne Valley Cutoff Road travels.

Stagecoach transmission would cross S.R.247 to tie into another visually-intrusive project, the Calcite substation.

These eyesores would render ineligible *fully one-half of the Scenic 247 Section 4 South*, already approved as eligible after in-person comparison with our Visual Assessment by Karen Watkins and Almabeth Anderson, Caltrans Landscape Architect.

We still have some fine-tuning on our recommendations to discuss, particularly specifying desert vegetation and special requests for turnouts with visitor information, traffic safety improvements, and directional signage.

Communications with Karen Watkins after the December hearing gave us a

high degree of confidence we were closing in on completion of the Corridor Protection Plan to Caltrans requirements and were ready for a Notice of Intent letter to be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

We can only hope to hear good news soon..

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