



PRESS RELEASE

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CASCABEL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION AND CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY RAISE CONCERNS WITH HELICOPTER CONSTRUCTION IN PAIGE CANYON, SAN PEDRO VALLEY

Threats to nesting raptors are among a broader suite of serious concerns

Tucson, Ariz. (May 8, 2024)—On May 6, the Cascabel Conservation Association (CCA) and the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) [wrote to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management \(USBLM\) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#) alerting them to the presence of zone-tailed hawk and grey hawk nests in Paige Canyon that require buffers from helicopter disturbance. CCA and CBD have requested that construction be halted at two tower pad sites located within the buffers specifically designated to protect raptor nests from helicopter disturbance. The CCA and CBD letter includes a map showing the hundreds of helicopter flight tracks over Paige Canyon and the nest sites.

Although CCA and CBD seek protections for specific raptor nests in Paige Canyon, [our concerns and Archaeology Southwest's concerns are broader](#). In January, Pattern Energy, the developer of the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, suspended monthly meetings with CCA, citing litigation as the reason. These meetings facilitated information exchange with the local community about construction plans and enabled the community to voice requests and concerns regarding safety and environmental safeguards.

Even before the abrupt suspension, Pattern Energy had been proceeding (and continues to proceed) at a breakneck speed in the San Pedro Valley without acting on violations of environmental protection protocols and without initiating a cultural landscape study. Such a study is required by the Arizona Corporation Commission and USBLM had committed to undertaking one. "A Cultural Landscape Study is necessary to identify Tribally important areas—including the San Pedro Valley itself—which may warrant reconsideration of the route or additional mitigation," said John R. Welch, Director of Landscape and Site Preservation for Archaeology Southwest. "The importance of the San Pedro Valley cannot be overstated—it is an

intact ***cultural landscape*** containing a record of over 13,000 years of human history, which continues to the present.”

Complementing this cultural landscape is a similarly important biological landscape that is within the second largest contiguous area of wildlands in Arizona.

Pattern Energy and USBLM are continuing a pattern of unwillingness to work with rightsholders, including the Tohono O’odham Nation and San Carlos Apache Tribe, and USBLM is continuing to neglect its legal obligations to identify traditional cultural places (TCPs) imperiled by construction. “Ongoing USBLM inattention to other-than-archaeological historic properties is allowing Pattern Energy to complete construction that is unmistakably harming the bio-cultural landscape and the Tribal and local communities that rely on that landscape for material and spiritual sustenance,” said Welch.

“Pattern continuously pats themselves on the back in public forums for their commitment to community engagement, and to going above and beyond in avoiding or mitigating harms to the ecosystem, but when construction began, commitments made in community meetings and to federal agencies were abandoned in their rush to get as much work done as possible before potentially getting shut down by litigation” said David Omick, a member of the CCA board.

About the Cascabel Conservation Association

The Cascabel Conservation Association is dedicated to the collaborative stewardship of the Middle San Pedro River watershed in a way that promotes the health, stability and diversity of the whole community, including its earth, waters, plants, and animals. We strive to integrate the needs of the land with the needs of a sustainable human community through educational, economic, agricultural, contemplative and other conservation related endeavors.

About the Center for Biological Diversity

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

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