

Landowners support road restrictions

http://www.dchieftain.com/news/landowners-support-road-restrictions/article_91ad90b4-7248-11e7-987d-c7f5648d9d18.html

By Scott Turner — El Defensor Chieftain Editor July 27, 2017

Several Socorro County landowners support an ordinance they hope will prevent the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project from using roads near their property.

Several Socorro County landowners support an ordinance they hope will prevent the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project from using roads near their property.

The Socorro County Board of Commissioners approved the ordinance placing limits on roads in the eastern part of the county. The ordinance restricts use of the roads to their historical use.

County Attorney Adren Nance said the ordinance restricts vehicles on the roads to under 5,000 pounds and under 14 feet tall.

The ordinance exempts solid waste vehicles, school buses and vehicles used for agriculture.

The ordinance applies to Socorro County Roads 121, 127, 152, 147, 131 and 181. Nance said the roads were narrow. He also said the county does not own the rights of way to the roads.

The ordinance would not necessarily keep the SunZia project or similar projects from coming through the county. It would — however — require companies involved with such projects to negotiate with landowners along such roads for the rights of way and require them to improve the roads should they decide to widen them.

A bond would also be required as to not create a financial burden for the county. It would also require an environmental impact study.

Landowner Oliver Lee reminded the commissioners that the county would still be responsible for maintaining the roads after the SunZia project is completed. He also said the Sheriff's Office would be required to monitor the roads to make sure the limits were met.

Both, he said, would cost the county revenue. Lee also said allowing a project such as SunZia to come through would also increase the number of trespassers for landowners who owned property along the roads.

Ralph Lopez said he was concerned the SunZia project would disrupt historical families living in the area. He said the private companies supporting the project would “profit by destroying the land they use.”

Billy Jack Pound said he was concern about the effects of the overhead lines on the health of local residents.

Several of the landowners said the county was having a difficult time maintaining the roads as it is. Keith Banks voiced a concern about what the project would do to cattle guards along the roads.

“Some of them are very old,” he said of the ones on County Road 127, which runs through his property.

Landowners also voiced a concern that the SunZia project could still impede the mission of White Sands Missile Range. They feel the project could affect pilot training missions and missile launch tests, something they said could end up hurting the local economy.

They also voiced concerns that property values would drop and that the lines could spoil pristine views.

The 515-mile project would transport electricity generated from wind farms in eastern New Mexico to users in Arizona and California.

