Dear Mr. Juen:

We are writing to bring your attention to the format of the public review meetings that were recently held for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), and to request public hearings in their place. We are also requesting a 60-day extension of the DEIS comment period to provide the time needed for a comprehensive response.

The intent of public review meetings should be to inform the public about a project, provide a forum to ask questions, encourage dialogue, and accept commentary. The only approved speakers at these meetings were those representing the Bureau of Land Management. *No public questioning of the speakers was permitted and no public discussion was allowed.* This narrow approach to public participation prevents the public from raising and discussing essential issues and thus is not in keeping with the spirit and intent of the National Environmental Policy Act. Having been denied the opportunity for this type of discussion, we herein request public hearings that allow stakeholders to question agency representatives. The public expects and deserves this from federal agencies.

Our second concern is the time permitted to respond to the DEIS. *Twenty-two hundred pages* of loosely organized material were dropped on the public and stakeholder groups. Expecting them to read, digest, analyze, and comment on it within 90 days is not realistic. In addition to the sheer volume of material to address, the following are contributing issues:

- Because of the scope and complexity of the DEIS and the substantial and unparalleled ecological resources it affects, stakeholders from across the region want the fullest opportunity to determine its deficiencies, understand potential long-term impacts, and provide commentary. This requires careful, extensive, and time-consuming review.

- Much of this commentary is expected from community volunteers who are not professional analysts, and who have many other obligations. A thorough review would require reading 24 pages per day for the full 90-day comment period.

- A major segment of the BLM’s preferred alternative in Arizona (C201) was not presented during the scoping phase of the project. The DEIS is the first public exposure to this alternative, something stakeholders could not anticipate.
The DEIS does not acknowledge any controversy related to the claimed benefits and purpose of the project. This controversy was brought to the BLM’s attention in numerous written scoping comments, requests for correction, and subsequent appeals as the DEIS was being prepared. This failure to address the most controversial aspect of the project further supports the need for public hearings.

To uphold the integrity of the NEPA process, it is necessary for the BLM to hold public hearings on SunZia in at least Socorro, New Mexico, and Tucson, Arizona. Other cities having significant attendance at the initial meetings included Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, and Benson, Arizona. Public hearings will give stakeholders an opportunity to provide meaningful input, discuss issues in a public setting, and have their questions answered. We also request that the BLM extend the comment period for the DEIS for at least 60 days to allow interested parties sufficient time to provide thoughtful, comprehensive comments. We are greatly concerned that this cannot be adequately done within the allotted 90-day comment period.

Sincerely

Norm “Mick” Meader, Co-Chair
Cascabel Working Group
6590 N. Cascabel Road
Benson, AZ 85602
(520) 323-0092
nmeader@cox.net

Judy Calman, Staff Attorney
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
142 Truman Street NW #B-1
Albuquerque, NM 87508
(505) 843-8696, ext. 102
judy@nmwild.org

Melanie Emerson, Executive Director
Sky Island Alliance
738 N. 5th Avenue #201
Tucson, AZ 85705-8400
(520) 624-7080, ext. 26
emerson@skyislandalliance.org

Sandy Bahr, Director
Grand Canyon Chapter, Sierra Club
202 E. McDowell Road, Suite 277
Phoenix, AZ 85004
(602) 253-8633
sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org

Peter Else
Friends of the Aravaipa Region
P.O. Box 576
Mammoth, AZ 85618
(520) 481-7761
bigbackyard@gmail.com

Lisa T. Belenky, Senior Attorney
Center for Biological Diversity
351 California Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94104
(415) 385-5694
lbelenky@biologicaldiversity.org

Albert Lannon
Citizens for Picture Rocks
P.O. Box 77100
Tucson, AZ 85703
(520) 622-6161
albertlannon@powerc.net

Paul Green, Executive Director
Tucson Audubon Society
300 E. University Boulevard, #120
Tucson, AZ 85705-7997
(520) 235-1796
pgreen@tucsonaudubon.org
Chris McVie, Secretary
Friends of the Ironwood Forest
738 N 5th Ave, Suite 114
Tucson, AZ 85705
(520) 628-2092
christina@ironwoodforest.org

Carolyn Campbell, Executive Director
Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
300 E. University Boulevard, #120
Tucson, AZ 85705
(520) 388-9923
carolyn.campbell@sonorandesert.org

Matt Skroch, Executive Director
Arizona Wilderness Coalition
P.O. Box 40340
Tucson, AZ 85717
(520) 326-4300
matt@azwild.org

Mike Carson, President
Empire-Fagan Coalition
P.O. Box 812
Vail, AZ 85641
(520) 762-4950
mike@empirefagan.org

Daly Edmunds, Regional Policy Coordinator
Audubon Rockies
155 N. 7th Street
Laramie, WY 82072
(307) 760-7342
dedmunds@audubon.org

cc: Mr. Mike Pool, Acting Director, Bureau of Land Management
Mr. Ken Salazar, Secretary, Department of the Interior
Mr. Adrian Garcia, SunZia Southwest Transmission Project Manager
Mr. Ray Suazo, Director, Arizona Bureau of Land Management
Mr. Mickey Siegel, SunZia DEIS Contractor, Environmental Planning Group
Mr. Tom Wray, Project Manager, SunZia Southwest Transmission Project