Leon Montoya  
BLM Project Manager  
1803 West Hwy 160  
Monte Vista, CO 81144  

RE: Public Scoping Comment for Rebuilding of Xcel Energy Transmission Lines  

August 27, 2013  

Dear Mr. Leon Montoya:  

San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council (SLVEC) and Conejos County Clean Water, Inc. (CCCW) thank the Bureau of Land Management for the opportunity to submit a scoping comment to inform the direction a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) should take as Xcel Energy rebuilds transmission lines, which we encourage to also include resolving electric reliability issues and potential export of renewable energy in the San Luis Valley.

Please accept this as a formal scoping comment from SLVEC and CCCW related to the direction the Draft EA should take in relation to solving reliability (voltage collapse) issues. Both SLVEC and CCCW are 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. SLVEC is based in Alamosa, Colorado and CCCW is based in Antonito, Colorado. Both organizations are incorporated under the laws of the State of Colorado.

Presently, a separate utility serving the SLV, Tri-State Generation and Transmission (Tri-State G&T), is pursuing resolving (voltage collapse) reliability issues by focusing on new transmission corridors south of the SLV. Two of the proposed corridors for new transmission infrastructure between the San Luis Substation and the Iron Horse Substation, or the San Luis Substation and the Taos-Ojo Substation have impacts to Conejos County, Colorado.¹

This is important because alternatives for social and environmental justice concerns in Conejos County need to be identified, and the project to rebuild Xcel Energy’s Transmission Lines over Poncha Pass is one such alternative.

SLVEC and CCCW have attended various discussions throughout the state of Colorado regarding generation, transmission, and energy related policy. As a result, SLVEC and CCCW encourage conversations on energy use, especially on renewable energy and how it can be structured to offer a clean, affordable, sustainable, and environmentally friendly alternative to carbon and nuclear-based fuels.

SLVEC and CCCW recognize the unique and valuable aspects the San Luis Valley (SLV) and Conejos County hold on our private and public lands in terms of resource value for the country’s potential solar production and associated transmission.

There is a history in the SLV of supporting solar energy on a distributed scale interconnecting existing transmission to power center-pivot sprinklers, schools, and homes.

SLVEC and CCCW encourage the development of renewable energy strategies that promote long-term public health, environmental health, water conservation, and the cultural preservation of the SLV and Conejos County.

SLVEC and CCCW respectfully request that Xcel Energy take a comprehensive, holistic, and sustainable view, and not compromise the SLV or Conejos County’s unique history, culture and environment. It is imperative that the range of alternatives also includes an analysis of a voltage upgrade on the existing Xcel Energy transmission line corridor. These alternatives should include “purpose and need” which analyze long term solutions to reliability issues within the SLV and include the analysis of potential export of renewable energy.

Historically, SLVEC has hosted public forums with technical facilitation in the SLV since 2008 including Conejos, Colorado over the past two years. The purpose of the forums was to synthesize community needs and integrate those with technical expertise from the community and throughout Colorado using a Solar/Transmission Working Group, which acted as a roundtable. SLVEC gathered community concerns and recommendations, which were coordinated to encompass in a map that can be viewed online at: http://slvec.org/images/stories/docs/6.23.10.SLVWPCEC_solarsensitiveresources_17x11_6162010.pdf.

We encourage the BLM to promote local community level awareness of Xcel Energy’s plans to rebuild new transmission infrastructure through the SLV using public hearings and a consensus building stakeholder advisory council. Please see Attachment A, the request to form a stakeholder advisory council to be assembled by Tri-State G&T, which was received favorably. Discussions should begin later this year for that stakeholder advisory council. Thank you for providing the catalyst for more powerful community discussions. Moving forward, we hope that Xcel Energy establishes a
presence in the communities in the SLV to ensure that all studies and plans are transparent. Please consider these comments on behalf of SLVEC and CCCW.
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Background of SLVEC and CCCW and Relationship to the Affected Environment

The San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council (SLVEC) is a public lands advocacy organization whose mission is to protect and restore—through research, education, and advocacy—the biological diversity, ecosystems, and natural resources of the Upper Rio Grande, balancing ecological values and human needs. SLVEC embraces and promotes the preservation of beauty, biodiversity and the health of the San Luis Valley and upper Rio Grande bioregion.

SLVEC helps organize over 120 volunteers involved in different working groups throughout the San Luis Valley. SLVEC also represents a 3,200 mailing list that includes individuals within the San Luis Valley, the state of Colorado and throughout the U.S. interested in public lands issues.

In June of 2010, a group of residents incorporated into a Colorado non-profit organization called Conejos County Clean Water, Inc. (CCCW). CCCW incorporated in order to promote awareness around health and environmental issues that affect residents in Conejos County, as a vehicle for protecting public health, and to responsibly manage natural resources. CCCW is comprised of ranchers, teachers, small business owners, and concerned citizens. CCCW has eleven Board members, who also serve as the organization’s Steering Committee, and 402 general members.

The San Luis Valley (SLV; the Valley) in south central Colorado is one of the largest sub-alpine Valleys in the world, encompassing over 8,100 square miles. Hemmed in on the west by the San Juan Mountains, and on the east by the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the SLV ranges in elevation from 7,000 to over 14,000 feet, and contains the headwaters of the Rio Grande River. The Rio Grande River rises in the San Juan Mountains to the west of the SLV, flows south into New Mexico and Texas and empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

The SLV has many unique biological features, including areas identified as Natural Heritage areas, and is home to six endemic insect species.

The SLV is 122 miles long and 74 miles wide. This largely agrarian and ranching community has a relatively stable population. Many of the residents are eighth-generation. The oldest Catholic parish in Colorado, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe) lies at the southern end of Conejos County. Conejos County is part of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area (NHA). About fifty percent (53%) of Conejos County’s population is minority, and pride in the Hispanic heritage is evident in everything from the names of the rivers, mountains, and towns, to the local Spanish/English radio station. The median household income is less than half the national average at $34,435 respectively (US Census 2012)
The SLV is known for its potatoes and alfalfa, and also grows barley, lettuce, wheat, peas, and spring grains. It has been a farming and ranching community for over 150 years, and many of the residents work in agriculture, following in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents. Many of the farmers and ranchers still practice traditional methods. The SLV is the highest irrigated mountain plateau in the world, with about 7000 high capacity wells, over half of which are irrigation wells.

The SLV encompasses over 5 million acres, of which 3.1 million (59%) are publicly owned: Forest Service, BLM, Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service, or state. This land-control configuration creates an important relationship between the public and private sectors with regard to both quality and quantity of air, surface water, and groundwater issues, in the SLV.

There are 18 incorporated municipalities in the SLV, many of which are located along the Rio Grande or its many tributaries. Six counties lie within this large geographical boundary: Alamosa, Rio Grande, Saguache, Mineral, Costilla, and Conejos. Conejos, Saguache and Costilla Counties are among the poorest counties in the nation, and unemployment levels run above the state and national averages: Conejos County 9.7%; as of 2013. These statistics do not including the chronically unemployed.

This scoping comment seeks to ensure that the BLM properly adheres to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)-and we encourage all Federal agencies to fully disclose and consider the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the full scope of the actions involved in, and related to issuing permits which allow the rebuilding of Xcel Energy’s Transmission lines in the San Luis Valley.

The direction the Draft EA should take in relation to solving reliability issues has implied impacts in Conejos and Saguache Counties.

Rebuilding of Xcel Energy Transmission Lines Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) Document

SLVEC and CCCW recognize there will be a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process through a Draft EA that this public scoping comment will be used to inform. SLVEC and CCCW understand that Rebuilding of Xcel Energy Transmission Lines aims primarily to address the replacement of Xcel Energy’s aging infrastructure. SLVEC and CCCW recommend the following three areas the Draft EA should also focus based on cost and reliability:

1) Generation options;
2) Transmission options; and
3) Demand side management and energy efficiency options.
Many citizens of the SLV speak Spanish only, or Spanish as their first language, and it would be helpful to provide study information in the regional colloquial Spanish. Of CCCW’s 402 members, only 70 have access to email and Internet.

**SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:**

1) that Xcel Energy create the following materials in both English and Spanish for optimal public review and understanding, and for reference at public hearings:
   a. One-page summary documents for each option,
   b. Comparative tables summarizing the reliability issue, and
   c. A document enumerating impacts for Conejos County only.

2) that printed project documents in both English and Spanish be placed in libraries and post offices in Conejos County, due to extremely limited Internet access. Both recommendations add cost.

3) that BLM host public hearings to disclose project plans to the impacted public, and to meaningfully engage the communities in the decision making process.

**Purpose and Need**

SLVEC and CCCW understand that Xcel Energy aims primarily to resolve aging infrastructure (rebuild) issues in the SLV, while at the same time Federal agencies are promoting utility scale development in the SLV, specifically in Saguache and Conejos County. These concurrent efforts in our communities may devalue local efforts, and promote boom-bust energy cycles that incidentally create:

- **Maximum environmental impacts** by enforcing accelerated project schedules in the Solar Energy Zones, 2

- **Least local benefits** since there is not a legal revenue sharing mechanism due to the Federal Lands Management Policy Act of 1976, and the management of Right-of-Ways 3

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2 See Supplement to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States page 2-10 Line 39 – “that construction must be completed within the time frames in the approved POD, but no later than 24 months after start of construction unless the project has been approved for phased development as described below,” and Supplement page 2-10 Line 44 “the BLM will not authorize more than three development phases for any solar energy ROW authorization”

3 See “ Supplement to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States page 2-Line 8 – ROW Authorizations – applications for utility-scale solar energy facilities will be authorized ROWs under Title V of FLPMA and 43 CFR Part 2800,” Line 19 – “the term “ROW” as defined by FLPMA includes and easement, lease, permit, or license to occupy, use, or traverse public lands,” and page 2-3 Line 22 “FLPMA does not provide existing or current authorities for the collection of royalties,”
• **A push for transmission energy export** without consideration of local Distributed Energy development since there is a 69kV line feeding Conejos County, which dead-ends in the incorporated municipality of Antonito; and a 69kV and 110 kV that currently carry Xcel Energy transmission over Poncha Pass; one large scale transmission project would dominate current carrying capacity and make smaller projects more difficult to integrate without system upgrades.

Some local citizens have speculated that Federal programmatic efforts will remove a coal plant from the central grid, claiming that the additional central-scale solar developments will reduce dependency on fossil fuels. CCCW views these observations as a linear trade-off of a utility scale intermittent generation source for a continuous utility scale base load generation such as coal and nuclear, and notes these to be a false comparison. Listening to technical experts across the state of Colorado, CCCW understands that coal and nuclear provide continuous base load power on the central grid, and that natural gas buffers the intermittency created by the renewable energy load on the central grid. It is important for Xcel Energy to partner with Tri-State G&T to address the impacts additional transmission will have on the energy portfolio of our nation in NEPA analysis and not focus solely on “rebuilding of aging infrastructure” issue. The possibility of new transmission can have impacts across the energy sector and it is imperative to have this discussion using the current NEPA process and incorporating the global energy picture so that residents and various federal agencies, corporations and cooperatives can make the best decisions locally.⁴

**SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:**

4) that Xcel Energy clearly communicate to impacted communities how they plan to address the reliability issue in the greater SLV, and coordinate with the other utility, Tri-State G&T to see how they can work together to mutually benefit each other instead of focusing on separate corridors;

5) include the distributed generation (DG) model for solar development as a viable approach in the SLV, and that Xcel Energy recognize that locally based generation and use is a way to promote reliability and redundancy. We request that Xcel Energy evaluate regional business models that make DG less difficult to integrate into the central grid.


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7) that prior to new transmission installations, on private or public land, that the SLV siting map\(^5\) be investigated, and existing transmission lines be rebuilt and voltage upgrade considered and analyzed as part of this effort.

8) Development of renewable energy on private land allows local control of project schedule and size, allows for revenue sharing, and may eliminate the need for Tri-State G&T additional transmission proposal in the southern portion of the San Luis Valley. This recommendation reduces overall transmission cost.

9) that transmission and associated impacts can be identified. There is a 69kV line to the town of Antonito, but no plans to upgrade lines.\(^6\) The Colorado Public Utilities Commission has not approved a plan for transmission south of Antonito. This recommendation needs to be investigated and may avoid major cost.

10) that this study clearly qualifies how Xcel’s upgrade efforts will eliminate reliability (voltage collapse) concerns for the San Luis Valley.

11) analyze within this EA range of alternatives the various options that were presented regarding voltage reliability for the San Luis Valley over Poncha Pass before the Public Utility Commission (PUC) Docket Nos. 09A-324E and 09A-325E (“CPCN Dockets”), Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. (“Tri-State”) and Public Service Company of Colorado (“Public Service”) regarding the San Luis Valley-Calumet Portion of the San Luis Valley-Calumet-Comanche Transmission Project.

\textit{Array of Alternatives}

\textit{SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:}

12) That Xcel Energy consider a full range of alternatives which include: an analysis of the present capacity of existing lines within the SLV and what will be needed in terms of upgrade of voltage capacity in order to provide a power generation goal in the SLV from renewable energy sources that equals the amount needed locally plus the amount that can be reasonably transported out of the SLV over Poncha Pass. This proposed alternative uses a phased approach of existing transmission corridors and does not capriciously expect the development of new transmission corridors, as Tri-State G&T is currently proposing from the SLV into New Mexico. Consider the following cost avoidance recommendations:

- SLV has a peak load of 150 MW locally, and Valley distributed generation providers can transmit 550 MW out of the SLV over Poncha Pass with reasonable transmission upgrades; the SLV cap should be 700 MW of generation. The San

\(^5\) Siting map online at: \url{http://slvec.org/images/stories/docs/6.23.10.SLVWPPEC_solarsensitiveresources_17x11_6162010.pdf}

Luis Valley Solar/Transmission Working Group calculates a higher number for the total SLV solar power cap at 950 MW, including 150 MW local load and 800 MW exportable power across Poncha Pass with Transmission upgrades.  

- Emphasize efficiency, conservation, and “smart grid” technologies.
- Consider small hydro and other technologies to round out the energy portfolio.
- Add energy storage at all substations.
- Phase in energy development to promote long-term jobs and revenue.
- Work with the Governor’s Energy Office and DOE to better understand options.
- Use zoning, annexation, and other incentives to motivate energy-related companies to locate offices, assembly, and warehouse facilities in incorporated municipalities, rather than in construction trailers on county or federal lands.
- Use incentives to motivate energy-related companies to hire local staff and construction workers. Encourage companies to prioritize hiring workers in local families who live in local communities rather than importing workers who live outside of existing town services.
- Schedule construction work to avoid planting and harvest seasons to expand opportunities for local workers.
- Perform any new or existing infrastructure upgrades in a way that eliminates the exposure of SLV residents to harmful electromagnetic frequencies.

Please see Attachment B for private sites identified at a Colorado Renewable Energy Workshop held in Monte Vista, Colorado at which the town of Antonito was a case study. The Town of Antonito is strategically positioned at the end of the grid to monitor concentrated load and distribution to the agriculture community.

**Infrastructure**

SLVEC and CCCW address the fact that there exists transmission infrastructure to accommodate distributed-scale utility development if the generation option is emphasized in the Draft EA. There is a 69kV line that feeds both the incorporated towns of Romeo and dead-ends in Antonito. We understand this 69kV line will not export power.\(^7\) Confirming the Colorado Governor’s Energy Office (2009) identification of the greater SLV as transmission-limited by the Renewable Energy Development Infrastructure (REDI). We have no major electricity load centers near Conejos County or transmission corridors approved south of Antonito into New Mexico, and there are no plans to upgrade lines. Xcel Energy is proposing upgrades of the lines over Poncha Pass by the year 2016. SLVEC and CCCW see an opportunity to consolidate efforts for the

\(^7\) Brubaker and Associates, Inc. Alternatives to the San Luis Valley-Calumet Portion of the San Luis Valley Calumet-Comanche Transmission Project, dated October 28, 2009, p.4

\(^8\) San Luis Valley Solar/Transmission Line Alternatives and Redundancy Recommendations, also know as the “Solar Position Paper” compiled by San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council in cooperation with the Citizens for San Luis Valley Water Protection Coalition, dated June 7, 2010 updated January 14, 2012

\(^9\) See Supplement to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States page 1-3, Line 13 – “Comment from solar industry – sufficient acreage to accommodate projected levels of development, the identified SEZs might not be located in the right places for meeting market demand.”
utilities serving the SLV in this effort to rebuild lines over Poncha Pass, since the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has not considered a plan for approval of a new corridor for transmission south out of Antonito, nor has it considered a transmission loop inside the Valley. In addition, in November of 2011, Xcel dropped its plan for a new transmission corridor to carry solar-generated electricity north to the Front Range population centers over La Veta Pass.\(^{10}\)

While the above focuses on electrical generation and transmission, parallel arguments can be said for other infrastructure including transportation and municipal, health/safety, workforce, and education services.

SLVEC and CCCW understand that Congress enacted NEPA to “promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment.” 42 U.S.C.§ 4331. CCCW also understands the cornerstone of NEPA is the environmental impact statement (EIS) that federal agencies must prepare and circulate for public review and comment. An EIS is required for all “major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.” 42 U.S.C.§ 4332 (2)(C); 40 C.F.R.§ 1501.4 “Major Federal actions” include those undertaken or financed by federal agencies. 40 C.F.R. §1508.18 (a). Federal agencies must prepare an EIS prior to initiating any major federal action so that environmental impacts can be considered and disclosed to the public during the decision-making process. 40 C.F.R. §§1501.2, 1502.5. In this document, the federal agency must identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the proposed and any connected actions, consider alternative actions and their impacts, and identify all irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources associated with the action. 42 U.S.C. §4332(2). This requirement is commonly referred to as the agency’s duty to take a “hard look” at the environmental impacts of its proposed action. The federal agency must also identify and evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of any mitigation measures for alleviating identified impacts from the proposed action. 40 C.F.R. §§1502.14(f), 1502.15(h).

SLVEC and CCCW encourage Xcel Energy to honor the nature of a “hard look” to include generation impact analysis and identify which options to study further, especially since other communities are impacted by Tri-State G&T proposal to expand transmission corridors in separate communities in the Southern part of the SLV. The reasoning is three-fold:

1. If transmission options are selected as a means to ensure reliability, partnerships can be realized that create good business decisions and long-term solutions.

2. The Valley is not located near load centers, new transmission corridors through northern New Mexico have many tribal impacts and the respective

governments and the local communities would need to be engaged, transmission cost would certainly increase to implement reliability solutions.

(3) It is hard to justify NEPA costs to tax payers when there are cheaper solutions to the reliability issue that exist with distributed generation and upgrades over Poncha Pass.

NEPA requires agencies to address connected actions in the same impact statement. 40 C.F.R. § 1508.25(a)(1). As the Tenth Circuit has stated: A connected action is defined as being closely related to other actions and is identified based on three factors:

(i) Automatically trigger other actions, which may require environmental impact statements.
(ii) Cannot or will not proceed unless other actions are taken previously or simultaneously.
(iii) Are interdependent parts of a larger action and depend on the larger action for their justification. 40 C.F.R. § 1508.25(a)(1).

**SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:**

13) that transmission impacts are given a “hard look” prior to Xcel Energy or Tri-State G&T initiating separate NEPA processes through the BLM. Xcel Energy must explain why “rebuild” transmission options would be chosen over an upgrade of voltage capacity using phased approach options in light of cumulative impacts from transmission development being proposed elsewhere, as in the Tri-State southern Corridor.¹¹

14) that Xcel Energy identify and evaluate different infrastructure layouts in the SLV comparing: 1) large utility scale solar development and 2) locally based DG combined with BLM-supported DG capped at Poncha Pass 3) voltage upgrade transmission potential, and power storage at all substations.

15) that Xcel Energy analyzes transportation access for any transportation related construction costs. The San Luis & Rio Grande rail line ends south of the town of Antonito, and within 250 feet of the Rio San Antonio (The San Antonio River). Riparian impacts of transportation would need to be assessed.

**Environmental Justice/Socioeconomics**

Conejos County is an environmental justice community. Any proposed transmission options in Conejos County are in environmental justice communities.

It is the unfortunate plight of many poor, socioeconomically depressed communities to be forced to choose between their livelihood, sustenance and basic survival and the many intrinsic factors that make them human, such as their culture, heritage and local history. In a more Edenic context, large power export out of the southern end of the Valley, in and around poor communities, would provide a means of meaningful, lasting and mutually beneficial revenue sharing, while still being cognizant of cultural landmarks, rich interwoven place and family histories, and the overall identity of the communities being affected.

Put another way, proposing transmission through Conejos County, has little in the way of long term or even medium range opportunity for the community. This is true in spite of the Tri-State’s asking locals to “give up” their public lands to transmission and in some instances their livelihood, i.e. longstanding ranching and grazing on BLM lands, so that a segment of the community can find fleeting relief from the manacles of poverty only to be cast back into the very same financial desperation once the projects are through. The studies to date have created no infrastructure to sustain meaningful, sustained economic advancement or development. In addition, the proposed corridors going south out of the Valley are rich in cultural artifacts, and historical significance, and in fact, the cultural and historical value of the area – which has deep and longstanding cultural and historic value for local communities – has not been closely examined.

We request that Xcel Energy partner with Tri-State G&T to resolve reliability issues through upgrades over Poncha Pass, and the entities put into motion a sustainable plan for revenue sharing and continued growth. Without such a plan, the development in the San Luis Valley will be, for all intents and purposes, asking the local citizenry to choose between two mutually exclusive (transmission) propositions, and will perpetuate and intensify environmental justice/low income concerns.

Fortunately, for environmental justice communities, there is protection under Executive Order 12898 of February 11, 1994, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. BLM is responsible for identifying and addressing potential disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental impacts on minority or low-income populations. Minority persons include those who identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino, (race designated as a minority race under Council on Environmental Quality Guidelines [CEQ 1997]). Persons whose income is below the Federal poverty threshold are designated as low income.

Several concerns have been raised that fall under environmental justice/low income consideration with regard to Xcel Energy pursing a plan to upgrade lines over
Poncha Pass while Tri-State G&T is concurrently pursing plans for resolution to reliability issues south into Northern New Mexico. There was not an effort for meaningful involvement for residents in Conejos or Saguache Counties for the studies; instead, all such public involvement occurred in Alamosa County in Alamosa, Colorado, which is approximately 30 miles north of Antonito and 25 miles south of the Saguache County border. Some community members work out of town during the week, and are too tired or unable to drive all the way to Alamosa. Reliability study documentation was inaccessible to the majority of residents in both Counties. For those with access to the Internet, the documentation was large and expensive to print out.

A final environmental justice/low income issue we raise is the transmission option impact of minimizing historical, cultural use of the land such as grazing. Conejos County is composed of 68% public lands; Saguache almost 60 % so grazing permits on all public lands have been integrated into the way of life in these counties for over 150 years.12

SLVEC and CCCW recognizes that the people in Conejos/Saguache Counties who welcome large-scale utility solar development and associated transmission do so in anticipation of the socioeconomic benefits the potential projects could bring to these Counties. Conversely, those who are opposed do so because the cumulative impacts to culture and environment are not completely understood, and there is an element of historic distrust for outside entities: federal agencies, corporations, and cooperatives.

SLVEC and CCCW raise a few concerns regarding impacts to existing industry and sources of revenue to these Counties, and raises some concerns as to how new transmission will impact the economy in these places.

The Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad (C&TS RR) has been designated an Area of Critical and Environmental Concern (ACEC), and is a large employer in the area. The ACEC is encompassed in the area proposed in the Antonito Southeast SEZ, including the area East of San Antonio Mountain. The C&TS RR ACEC embraces the area from Ortiz, Colorado to the Colorado / New Mexico border because of the high-value hills with flat open range for wildlife grazing, piñon, juniper, and ponderosa pine forests.

An additional ACEC in Conejos County is located eight miles southwest of La Jara, where the Conejos River forms its southern boundary. This area was designed as an ACEC due to the critical winter range for big game species. Mountain plover, a BLM sensitive species, nests in this area. The area is characterized by wind sweep, gorgeous views of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, and a traditional hunting area long

12 See Supplement to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States page 2-5 Line 35 – “Notification to Livestock Grazing Operators”, and Line 37 – “BLM authorized office will send a certified letter to the permittee/lessee to serve as the 2-year notification of the BLM’s potential decision to cancel the permit/lease, in whole or in part, and devote the public land to a public purpose that may preclude livestock grazing.”
cherished by Antonito and Capulin residents.

Additionally, CCCW/SLVEC notes that the services, which municipalities of Conejos and Saguache Counties would need to provide for any proposed large scale Solar Development installations are in different parts of these Counties and would thus strain various parts of the local service infrastructure differently. These differential impacts include schools, health/clinics including emergency services, road and bridge, and other municipal management all without a programmatic legal revenue sharing mechanism in place for local economies.

Tourism, hunting and grazing are critical to the economic development and social stability of our region. People come to these Counties for the peace and quiet it offers. If new transmission infrastructure is installed in these Counties, CCCW/SLVEC requests that the following measures be put into effect to protect our already struggling economy.

**SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:**

16) that Xcel Energy avoid corridors that do not conform to the final SLV BLM Travel Management Plan (TMP) Environmental Assessment (EA) and objectives which include: strict conformance to Visual Resource Management class objectives, protection of historical and visual values, and protection of National Register eligible cultural resources for C&TS RR.

17) that Xcel Energy not displace traditional hunting areas for local residents. Hunting offsets costs for food in the winter months.

18) cautious phasing of any solar development on SLV BLM lands, which would promote long-term, locally based jobs in these Counties. SLVEC and CCCW recommend that BLM lands be developed over a period of 10-20 years.

19) Xcel Energy discuss local job multipliers in considerable detail, and what other local economic multipliers could be expected for the San Luis Valley.

20) that Xcel Energy consider that local firefighters, first responders, and the SLV Regional Medical Center need to be equipped with the proper gear and training to handle additional general risk and potential hazardous materials incidents, and require that developers offset the associated costs.

21) that Xcel Energy will offer guidance to local communities regarding potentially successful revenue sharing approaches.
22) that Xcel Energy will analyze and report on the socioeconomic impacts of the practice of using local contractors to partner on contracts, and provide analysis of ways to increase local contracting and lease partnerships.

23) That Xcel Energy work with the BLM to discuss what happens to the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) to Conejos County. PILT are Federal payments to local governments that help offset losses in property taxes due to nontaxable Federal lands within their boundaries. Conejos County received $1,014,319 in 2012. Xcel Energy and BLM should discuss tax incentives to impacted Counties.

24) that Xcel Energy discuss phasing and revenue sharing for the benefit of these Counties as discussed above, offering guidance on upgrading community services particular to the solar industry.

25) that Xcel Energy consider how Distributed Generation (DG) projects would be connected and benefit from this transmission line proposal that would have the possibility to generate abundant power in smaller increments (less than 20MW) on sites on smaller pieces of ground that fit better into existing land use such as irrigation corners (SLV potential 2,500 MW), and sites that are already disturbed, as well as BLM lands. Also, please include smaller sites owned by towns throughout the valley, including special districts like Schools or Water and Sanitation that can help reduce electrical costs. See Attachment B for sites identified in Conejos County during a Colorado Renewable Energy Society Workshop in Monte Vista, Colorado November 2011.

26) a phased approach of 10-30 MW per year for 10-20 years, in order to avoid boom-bust cycles and to promote permanent jobs and revenues for San Luis Valley residents.

27) that Xcel Energy aim first to improve local efficiencies and generate enough power to satisfy local needs, and then build generation transmission up to the total amount that can be transmitted out of the SLV over Poncha Pass.

28) that Xcel Energy encourage formation of a local power cooperative that can manage and tax power generation, (using Alamosa County is an example) so the SLV community is not completely burdened by regional power companies.

29) that Xcel Energy develop proactive revenue sharing methods so that reasonable funding can go to: SLV school districts K-12 and technical training at local colleges; conservation of water, soil, and wildlife habitat; health and human services; and road and bridge mitigations and improvements within the impacted counties.
30) that Xcel Energy ensure that all contractors and vendors are trained and registered in the System Award Management (SAM) database, the primary supplier database for the U.S. Federal government, and the Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) database.

31) that Xcel Energy ensure that all contractors and vendors within the SLV are engaged in a meaningful way in any site-specific NEPA processes.

32) that BLM prepare a socioeconomic analysis that is based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the benefits and burdens, that identifies the recipients of these benefits and burdens in context of environmental justice principles, and that recognizes these benefits and burdens accrue across local, regional, nation scales and a variety of local socioeconomic categories.

Natural Resources

Every acre impacted by transmission option corridors is part of the greater SLV ecosystem. Every intact acre indicating a healthy ecosystem has high cultural, heritage, and public health value for the people who live in our area.

Geology and Soils

SLVEC and CCCW would like to let Xcel Energy know that soils in the area are shallow.

SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:

33) that Xcel Energy prohibit a loss of remaining soil structure by using advanced soil mitigation techniques including carbon-capture mechanisms.

34) that Xcel Energy prohibit typical over-lot grading (100% soil disturbance) and promote conservation of intact patches, stabilizing disturbances immediately, and conserving and reusing all topsoil materials immediately.

Water and Connected Actions

SLVEC and CCCW recognize that water is the most precious natural resource in Conejos County and the SLV. Unfortunately, developers at the headwaters of the Rio Grande are already dealing with intense competition among potential water users for over-appropriated water supplies, Rio Grande Compact obligations to downstream users, and agricultural water use in the Valley. The biggest question and concern in the largely agrarian community remains: In terms of connected action related to an upgrade of a proposed voltage upgrade, where will the water come from for any proposed utility scale solar development which would be a likely outcome, whether that development is on private or public land? Local renewable energy planning efforts are
focused on center pivot sprinkler irrigation corners and on lands that are going out of agriculture rotation due to state water augmentation laws.\textsuperscript{13}

There is a longstanding history of effort at the federal, state and local levels to protect and conserve water interests in the SLV, including:

- The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000,
- CCCW as catalyst for halting a proposal to transfer from truck to rail radioactive, hazardous and toxic waste within 250 feet of the Rio San Antonio (San Antonio River), and
- the Valley’s successful legal thwarting of a proposal by American Water Development Incorporated (AWDI) for the right to pump 200,000-acre ft. of water per year from the confined aquifer.

The large scale utility projects that would be developed as a result of new transmission raise particular concerns for residents in Conejos and Saguache Counties, especially any large scale solar thermal proposals with regard to the introduction of heavy oils for heat transfer; the introduction of ethylene glycol to stop water from freezing, and other types of potential spillage associated with development, including eutectic salts used in Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) technology.

SLVEC’s and CCCW’s final concern regarding water availability leads to questions about converting an Agricultural water right into Municipal and Industrial (M &I) use, which could be the case with utility scale solar development and associated transmission. Once that change in water right occurs, it will remain in use for industrial scale purposes because it will no longer be economically feasible for it to return to agriculture. In viewing this scenario long term, it’s important for Xcel Energy to understand that such designations essentially removes water from SLV’s traditional water cycle usages in perpetuity.

**SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:**

35) that Xcel Energy develop water-wise guidelines for solar development and associated transmission, so that the concerned public can see the tradeoffs involved in proposed use of limited fresh water. It is imperative that Xcel Energy be cautious about protecting these groundwater systems, so that they’ll remain intact for traditional agricultural and cultural use for future generations.

36) that Xcel Energy encourage low water use facilities, and avoid wetlands and open water.

\textsuperscript{13} Finley, ”Water worries in Colorado’s San Luis Valley come to surface.” Online at: http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_19756115#ixzz1jkYpi570.
37) that Xcel Energy by partnering with Tri-State G&T ensures that all renewable energy development and associated transmission in the San Luis Valley:

- does not put at risk our critically important aquifer, wetlands and other water sources that support migratory waterfowl, diverse ecosystems, historical and vital water-intensive agricultural uses;
- does not in particular deplete the extensive but fragile aquifers that support these values, which citizens of the SLV have worked long and hard to protect.

38) that Xcel Energy quantify the impact of the future use of converted M & I water rights, especially where technological changes will occur that may eventually render these utility scale solar facilities obsolete.

Vegetation/Landscape/Reclamation

It is very difficult to xeriscape in Conejos County and the SLV, which is a sub-alpine desert with fragile native and introduced vegetation. Preservation of the following native vegetation is important: piñon-juniper shrublands, ponderosa pine (higher elevation-near Forest BLM boundary). Reclamation was a concern raised at the forum CCCW hosted earlier this year. Dust, sand and air quality are major issues of concern to communities the SLV.

SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:

39) that Xcel Energy develop conservation guidelines that include native buffer strips and shrub windrows.

Air Quality

SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:

40) that Xcel Energy prohibit over-lot grading, promote conservation of existing soils and vegetation, and use dust inhibitors on open ground.

Wildlife

The San Luis Valley has enormous wildlife values that should not be reduced or degraded. An upgrade of a transmission corridor will include the likelihood of developing utility scale solar development and associated transmission would impact open range for large mammal movement. Utility scale solar development should be coordinated with wildlife conservation.
The San Luis Valley is known for its game animal hunting grounds, and SLVEC and CCCW request that Xcel Energy assess any impacts to game animals, such as disruptions to elk rut and calving. These sensitive cycles for the elk population are so significant, widely appreciated, and well-known that particular roads are closed throughout Colorado during certain times of the year, particularly in the Spring, specifically to protect the calving areas, as tranquility during this time is critical for their survival.

The SLV contains a plethora of wildlife resources including; Elk Overall Range, Elk Winter Range, Elk Severe Winter Range, Gunnison’s Prairie Dog Colonies, Gunnison’s Prairie Dog Overall Range, Mountain Lion Overall Range, Mule Deer Overall Range, Mule Deer Winter Range, Pronghorn Overall Range, Pronghorn Winter Range, Wildlife Linkage Corridor, Bald Eagle Winter, Bald Eagle Winter Range, and Black Bear Overall Range. CCCW supports preservation of the winter wildlife range, mating grounds, and birthing grounds.\(^{14}\)

**SLVEC and CCCW respectfully recommend:**

41) that Xcel Energy consider mitigating transmission corridors to preserve the winter wildlife range, mating grounds, and birthing grounds.

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**Natural History and Cultural Resources Management**

Conejos County has enormous natural history values including being part of the Sangre de Cristo NHA, and long human use. The mission of the NHA is to promote, preserve, protect and interpret profound historical, religious, environmental, geographic, geologic, cultural and linguistic resources. These efforts will contribute to the overall national story, engender a spirit of pride and self-reliance in local communities, and create a legacy in the Colorado counties of Alamosa, Conejos, and Costilla.

The geologic resources found in the NHA are directly associated with human habitation. The layered water systems first brought in game that attracted many Native tribes to the area over 12,000 years ago.

Hispanic settlers from the south were enticed to raise crops and sheep through land grants under Mexican communal law, a practice that was adopted under Spanish reign and continued when Mexico won its independence from Spain, to settle the region the NHA presently encompasses. When the Mexican-American war ended in 1848 and

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\(^{14}\) Attachment C - Species Data focus on 4 Solar Study Areas in the San Luis Valley totaling Approx. 22,000 acres, Areas include: Detilla Gulch-1520 acres, Four Mile East-3,878 acres, Los Mogotes East-5,905 acres and Antonito South East- 9,591 acres compiled by San Luis Valley Ecosystem County for the Draft Solar PEIS.
the territory was ceded to the United States with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Conejos Land Grant (which includes present day Conejos County, Rio Grande County and portions of Alamosa County and Saguache County) was the only land grant that was petitioned for a patent and denied in its entirety.\textsuperscript{15}

Subsequently, homesteading that began in 1861 brought Anglo influence to the area, and largely changed the trade and barter system to a currency economy. Hispanic and Anglo ranchers and farmers raised cattle and wheat, and have progressed to present-day crops of alfalfa, potatoes, and lettuce. The geographic isolation of the area has essentially preserved cultural identity of these rural communities.

This NHA includes the oldest Catholic parish in Colorado (Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe) in Conejos County, and the water with the oldest water rights in Colorado. To ensure the preservation of culture of the Conejos County population, it is important to capture the story of the land that is encompassed in Conejos County. It is important that the area be surveyed and ethnographically studied prior to any development occurring.

Recently, the National Park Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior convened with Colorado elected officials in Alamosa, Colorado. A study was proposed to determine the cultural resource value in several Counties in the SLV for a National Historical Park designation. The counties named included Conejos County.\textsuperscript{16}

Conejos County has traditional uses that follow the wildlife corridor’s hunting, grazing and fuel gathering uses by people of Conejos County for more than 150 years. A CCCW group member shared pictures for the purpose of bringing awareness to the BLM about the cultural resource value that exists within the proposed Antonito Southeast Solar Energy Zone (SEZ), which is within the vicinity of the historic Old Spanish Trail. Please see Attachment D for cultural resource value and note the BLM is amenable to moving any sort of development five miles away from historical trails.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{SLVEC and CCCW respectfully request:}

42) that Xcel Energy acknowledge transmission corridors are part of a Mexican Land Grant: Los Conejos.

43) that Xcel Energy efforts assure that as part of a connected transmission upgrade action, that all development resulting from this “potential” voltage upgrade be done with respect to natural history and cultural values by performing complete cultural surveys and ethnographic studies when the Solar Energy Zones (SEZ’s) are initiated,

\textsuperscript{15} McCourt, “\textit{The Conejos Land Grant Southern Colorado}”, Colorado Magazine, Vol. 52 (1975): 36-51.

\textsuperscript{16} San Luis Valley and Central Sangre de Cristo Mountains Reconnaissance Survey Report December 2011, online at: http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkId=73&projectID=39991&documentID=44749

\textsuperscript{17} Dubois, “BLM to expand buffer around historic trails from a quarter-mile to five miles”, The Westerner, online at: http://thewesterner.blogspot.com/2012/01/blm-to-expand-buffer-around-historic.html
including utilizing local cultural authors and artists to capture the story. There are
deep community concerns with accelerated project schedules and qualitative
analysis completed to date which lack important documentation of natural resource
and historic value.\(^{18}\)

44) that Xcel Energy make concerted efforts to conserve areas of moderate to high
probability of natural and cultural resources including areas south of Antonito into
New Mexico, including utilization of local artists and cultural authors to capture the
story.\(^ {19}\)

45) that Xcel Energy reliability studies or developments not displace any historic grazing
on BLM lands.

46) that Xcel Energy meticulously honor the five-mile radius surrounding historic trails.

47) that Xcel Energy partner with Tri-State for upgrades over Poncha Pass to ensure
studies not conflict with the San Luis Valley and Central Sangre de Cristo Mountains
Reconnaissance Survey Report, December 2011.\(^ {20}\)

**Visual Impacts**

Please see *Environmental Justice/Socioeconomics* on pages 13-17 of this
comment for a distribution of Visual Impacts to the C&Ts RR, and Conejos County’s local
economy.

**Cumulative Impact Considerations/Public Health**

SLVEC and CCCW respectfully requests that any development adequately
address the health impacts from exposure to electromagnetic frequencies and
hazardous materials incidents (including from CSP), by including protective buffers
around substations and transmission lines, by developing proper guidelines for

\(^{18}\) See Supplement to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States
page 2-17 “SF Areas with important cultural and archaeological resources, such as traditional cultural properties and Native
American sacred sites, as identified through consultation and recognized by the BLM.”, page 2-20 Line 18 – “…future reviews of
applications within SEZs can tier to that NEPA analysis, thereby limiting the required scope and effort of additional project-specific
NEPA analyses. Tiering is defined as using the coverage of general matters in broader NEPA documents in subsequent, narrower
NEPA documents. This allows the tiered NEPA document to concentrate solely on the issues not already addressed.”, Line 24 – “The
extend of this tiering, however, will vary from project to project, as will the necessary level of NEPA documentation.”, page 2-23 Line
1 – “SWCA Environmental Consultants to produce an ethnographic overview of six Tribes within the Great Basin region with cultural
and historic ties to SEZs in Nevada and Utah.”, page 2-23 Facilitate Faster and Easier Permitting in SEZs Line 41 – “The BLM will
adhere internally to strict schedules for the completion of environmental reviews for applications in SEZs…”

\(^{19}\) See See Supplement to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern
States page 2-7 Line 39 – “the BLM may also require bond coverage for all expenses tied to cultural resources identification,
protection, and mitigation. This may include, but is not limited to, costs associated with ethnographic studies, inventory, testing,
egemorphological studies, data recovery, compensatory mitigation…”, page 2-13 Line - 27 “…recognizing that data regarding the
actual impacts of solar energy development on various resources are still limited…will develop and incorporate into its Solar Energy
Program an adaptive management and monitoring plan to ensure that data and lessons learned about the impacts of solar energy
projects will be collected, reviewed, and, as appropriate, incorporated into the BLM’s Solar Energy Program in the future.”

\(^ {20}\) San Luis Valley and Central Sangre de Cristo Mountains Reconnaissance Survey Report December 2011, online at:
http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=73&projectID=39991&documentID=44749
distances from homes, schools, etc., by defining potential transmission corridors that avoid homes, schools, etc., and by developing guidelines for community zoning to properly maintain protections. There are widespread concerns about accelerated project schedules and qualitative analysis completed to date, which precluded the importance of promoting meaningful public involvement in the environmental justice community of Conejos County.  

Conclusions

SLVEC and CCCW respectfully request that a representative from the Conejos County Board of Commissioners (County Administrator Tresessa Martinez, 719.376.5772 and Wendi Maez, Land Use Saguache County 719.655.2321 be invited for further discussion on transmission.

For the sake of clarity SLVEC and CCCW would like to emphasize our preferred alternative for long term reliability; that Xcel Energy and Tri-State G&T work together for a mutually beneficial business relationship that integrates the following criteria to be included for study in the alternatives:

1) studies the peak load for the SLV and plans for the next 20 years, we understand that the load is now about 155 MW locally.
2) The Valley renewable generation providers, with emphasis on distributed generation, can transmit 550 MW out of the SLV over Poncha Pass with reasonable transmission upgrades; the SLV cap should be 700 MW of generation.
3) The San Luis Valley Solar/Transmission Working Group calculates a higher number for the total SLV solar power cap at 950 MW, including 150 MW local load and 800 MW exportable power across Poncha Pass with Transmission upgrades.
4) Emphasize efficiency, conservation, and “smart grid” technologies. Consider small hydro and other technologies to round out the energy portfolio.
5) Add energy storage at all substations.
6) Phase in energy development to promote long-term jobs and revenue.
7) Work with the Governor’s Energy Office and DOE to better understand options.
8) Use zoning, annexation, and other incentives to motivate energy-related companies to locate offices, assembly, and warehouse facilities in

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21 See Supplement to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States page 2-20 Line 18 – “…future reviews of applications within SEZs can tier to that NEPA analysis, thereby limiting the required scope and effort of additional project-specific NEPA analyses. Tiering is defined as using the coverage of general matters in broader NEPA documents in subsequent, narrower NEPA documents. This allows the tiered NEPA document to concentrate solely on the issues not already addressed.”, Line 24 – “The extend of this tiering, however, will vary from project to project, as will the necessary level of NEPA documentation”, page 2-23 Facilitate Faster and Easier Permitting in SEZs Line 41 – “The BLM will adhere internally to strict schedules for the completion of environmental reviews for applications in SEZs….”
incorporated municipalities, rather than in construction trailers on county or federal lands.

9) Use incentives to motivate energy-related companies to hire local staff and construction workers. Encourage companies to prioritize hiring workers in local families who live in the local towns rather than importing workers who live outside of town resources.

10) Schedule energy construction work to avoid planting and harvest seasons to expand opportunities for local workers.

11) Perform any new or existing infrastructure upgrades in a way that minimizes the exposure of local residents to harmful electromagnetic frequencies.

12) analyze within this EA range of alternatives the various options that were presented regarding voltage reliability for the San Luis Valley over Poncha Pass before the Public Utility Commission (PUC) Docket Nos. 09A-324E and 09A-325E ("CPCN Dockets"), Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. ("Tri-State") and Public Service Company of Colorado ("Public Service") regarding the San Luis Valley-Calumet Portion of the San Luis Valley-Calumet-Comanche Transmission Project.

Thank you for your careful consideration of SLVEC’s and CCCW’s scoping comments. Please keep us informed of any upcoming public meetings in the SLV and Conejos/Saguache Counties, and feel free to use us as support to connect you to resources in the SLV.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Canaly, Director
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
P.O. Box 223
Alamosa, CO 81101
719.589.1518
info@slvec.org
www.slvec.org

Andrea T. Guajardo, Director
Conejos County Clean Water, Inc.
P.O. Box 153
Antonito, CO 81120
720.939.9948
andieguaajardo@gmail.com
http://www.conejoscountycleanwater.org
Cc:
Gail Schwartz – State Senator
Larry Crowder – State Senator
Ed Vigil – State Representative
Erin Minks – Representative for U.S. Senator Mark Udall
Brenda Felmlee – Representative for U.S. Congressman Scott Tipton
Charlotte Bobicki – Representative for U.S. Senator Michael Bennet
Steve McCarroll – Conejos County Commissioner
John Sandoval – Conejos County Commissioner
Mitchell Jarvies – Conejos County Commissioner
Linda Joseph-Saguache County Commissioner
Jason Anderson-Saguache County Commissioner
Ken Anderson-Saguache County Commissioner
Wendy Maez-Saguache County Land Use
Linda DeHerrera – Conejos County Land Use Administrator
Mike Trujillo – Antonito Town Mayor
Don Martinez – Romeo Town Mayor
Nicole Korbe – Tri-State G&T
Christina Gallegos-Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area
Attachment A
Delivered via email to nkorbe@tristategt.org and scarlisle@tristategt.org

Conejos County Clean Water Inc.

Tri-State G&T
Attn: Nicole Korbe and Sarah Carlisle
PO Box 33695
Denver, CO 80233-0695

RE: Request for Tri-State Generation and Transmission Inc. to form a Stakeholder Advisory Committee prior to the initiation of any National Environmental Policy Act processes affecting the San Luis Valley

January 25, 2012

Dear Ms. Nicole Korbe and Ms. Sarah Carlisle:

Please let this letter serve as a follow-up to the discussion with Nicole Korbe on Monday, January 21, 2012. Conejos County Clean Water, Inc. (CCCW) wants to thank Tri-State Generation and Transmission Inc. (G&T) for taking steps to engage impacted communities as they move forward with identifying options to resolve electric reliability issues in the San Luis Valley.

Since our comment submitted to you on May 11, 2012 (attached as Tri-State G&T Comment.pdf), CCCW has continued to attend various discussions throughout the state of Colorado regarding generation, transmission, and energy related policy. CCCW is also partnering with the Town of Antonito, Community Energy Inc., and Colorado Harvesting Energy Network to develop a 2 MW Community Solar Garden in Antonito, Colorado. Additionally, CCCW has representation on the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) to the Environmental Protection Agency, which is chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. As part of those discussions, CCCW had input into the Model Plan for Public Participation in Environmental Justice Communities. CCCW had representation at the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) certification training in Denver held August 6-10, 2012, which was conducted by LaVerne Kyriss, senior manager for the Western Area Power Administration.

Due to recent media coverage indicating that reliability solutions could impact Conejos County, CCCW is requesting that Tri-State G&T establish a presence in Conejos County and other impacted communities by forming a Stakeholder Advisory Council.
Please accept this as a formal request from CCCW for Tri-State G&T to form a Stakeholder Advisory Council prior to initiation of any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes affecting the San Luis Valley.

Background of CCCW and Relationship to the Affected Environment

CCCW’s relationship to the affected environment remains unchanged and the concerns and recommendations we made in our May 11, 2012 comment regarding the direction current studies should take in relation to solving reliability issues remains unchanged.

Since its inception, CCCW has been engaged with energy, public health and Environmental Justice issues. We are concerned when infrastructure proposed in one location is diverted to another location that lacks the technical and financial resources necessary for independent judgments. This was the case when the Calumet-Comanche project was diverted south to potentially impact Conejos County. CCCW is therefore requesting that Tri-State G&T agree to form the Stakeholder Advisory Council along with necessary financial support.

Proposed Stakeholder Advisory Council

CCCW recognizes there will be future NEPA efforts triggered by utilizing Rural Utility Services (RUS) funds or by impacting Federal lands; understands there will need to be approval from the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) in Colorado; understands there will need to be approval from the Public Regulatory Commission (PRC) in New Mexico; understands there will be local land use process in the impacted Counties; and there will be Government-to-Government consultations for impacted tribes once the lead Federal agency is identified for this project.

CCCW would like to clarify that our request for Tri-State G&T to form a Stakeholder Advisory Council will NOT replace or remove any of the public processes described above.

The Stakeholder Advisory Council’s purpose is to:
1) be used to incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of Tri-State G&T by meaningfully engaging the impacted communities including the Environmental Justice communities in Conejos County;
2) enhance the public’s participation in all future public participation processes, and assist Tri-State G&T in being responsive to the public’s concerns and suggestions by building capacity in the impacted communities through education of the purpose and need of the San Luis Valley Transmission Project, Generation options (including distributed generation), Transmission options, Demand side management and energy.
efficiency options, revenue sharing options, and addressing the fact that Xcel dropped its plan for a new transmission corridor to carry solar-generated electricity north to the front range population centers over La Veta Pass.¹

3) secure broad-based participation and understanding of the proposed “preferred alternative” and its impacts,

4) build trust by undertaking and encouraging actions that are credible during Stakeholder discussions, including transparency and respect by addressing the five-year dispute of the Calumet-Comanche project and the Environmental Justice issue of pursuing an alternative that goes through many Environmental Justice communities,²

5) ensure that all impacted stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public processes described above,

6) identify strategies that risk polarizing community interest, and assure these strategies are avoided during the public processes described above,

7) build consensus in impacted communities by acknowledging the ongoing efforts of the San Luis Valley Solar Working Group,

8) identify and mitigate environmental, cultural and economic impacts, and

9) secure independent technical experts to assist the impacted communities to meaningfully engage in the NEPA process.

**CCCW respectfully recommends:**

1) that Tri-State G&T create the Stakeholder Advisory Council and hold monthly meetings over a six-month period prior to NEPA scoping.

   a. The mission statement for the Stakeholder Advisory Council will be to highlight the need to work with communities and concerned citizens to address environmental and human health concerns while offering input as Tri-State G&T moves forward to responsibly plan a project that will be compatible with the conservation and economic goals of the region.

   b. Stakeholders can include representation from: County leaders, Municipal leaders, water conservancy districts, environmental organizations, public land advocates, tribal leaders, tribal community organizations, Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service, private landowners, and the interested public across the affected environment.

   c. Tri-State G&T will provide the following: Project Manager, discussion facilitator, project economist, engineers, meeting facilities in impacted communities, food for discussions, transportation when necessary to the

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¹ Public Service Company of Colorado 2014 Renewable Energy Standard Compliance Plan online at:  

² Brubaker and Associates, Inc. Alternatives to the San Luis Valley-Calumet Portion of the San Luis Valley Calumet-Comanche Transmission Project, dated October 28, 2009

*Conejos County Clean Water Inc.*  
P.O. Box 153  
Antonio, CO 81120  
[www.conejoscountycleanwater.org](http://www.conejoscountycleanwater.org)
meetings, and information repository in English and Spanish in impacted communities.

d. Tri-State G&T can utilize IAP2. The IAP2 provides tools, useful tips, effective meeting facilitation techniques and can be found online at www.iap2.org.

e. Tri-State G&T will provide visual maps for all discussions, which stakeholders can manipulate and mark on with push pins including the map found online at:

f. Tri-State G&T will utilize a three-dimensional computer aided drafting tool or similar to provide visual modeling during stakeholder discussions. One such example can be found online at:

g. Tri-State G&T will secure independent technical experts to assist the impacted communities to meaningfully engage in the NEPA process.

Conclusions

We fully recognize that there will be stakeholders from all impacted communities and would be willing to help Tri-State G&T in organizing the group of stakeholders in Conejos County.

Thank you for your careful consideration of CCCW’s request and recommendations. Please keep us informed of your decision, please hold meetings in Conejos County, and use us as a resource. We can be reached via email at info@conejoscountycleanwater.org or via phone at 720-939-9948. We look forward to working with you and seeing a project to completion.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea T. Guajardo, CCCW Executive Director

Enclosure (1)

Cc:
Gail Schwartz – State Senator
Larry Crowder – State Senator
Ed Vigil – State Representative
Erin Minks – Representative for U.S. Senator Mark Udall
Brenda Felmlee – Representative for U.S. Congressman Scott Tipton
Charlotte Bobicki – Representative for U.S. Senator Michael Bennet
Steve McCarroll – Conejos County Commissioner
Mike Trujillo – Antonito Town Mayor
Don Martinez – Romeo Town Mayor
Joe Mestas – Manassa Town Mayor
Andrew Archuleta – Bureau of Land Management
Paul Tigan - Bureau of Land Management
Attachment B
The Town of Antonito was a case study in November 2011 for a Colorado Renewable Energy Society (CRES) workshop in Monte Vista, Colorado.

The sites in the following pages were discussed as well as a site adjacent to the proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ that is designated Sections 18 & 36 property, giving revenues to local schools.

CCCW helped the Town of Antonito identify the sites for discussion at the workshop.
Proposed Renewable Energy Park – site (1) - Antonito Wastewater Treatment Facility

- Identified as a good site for mixed use DG renewable energy development.
- The site is approximately 40 acres.
- The Antonito substation is directly across the street to the west.
- This site is approximately one mile north of the proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ.
- First project is a Community Solar Garden under the state of Colorado policy signed in 2010.

Photo credit: Mike Trujillo
Proposed Renewable Energy Park – site (1) - Antonito Wastewater Treatment Facility

- This is the substation that is at the end of existing transmission in the SLV.
- The transmission feeding this substation is 69kV.
- This substation is approximately 3 miles north of the proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ.
- This substation is directly across the street from the Antonito wastewater treatment facility.

Photo credit: Mike Trujillo
Renewable Energy Planning – site (2) – Valle Escondido Ranch

- Case study – Valle Escondido Ranch
- Identified as a good site for small utility scale solar during CRES workshop (8 MW).
- Approximately 80 acres is presently for sale.
- This site is approximately one mile north of the proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ.

Photo credit: Mike Trujillo
Renewable Energy Planning – site (3) – Abeyta Ranch Center Pivot Sprinkler corners

- Identified for future solar development to offset demand charges on corners while agriculture use remains.
- Approximately two miles north of the proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ.
- Corner capacity in the SLV has been identified by Colorado Harvesting Energy Network to have a 2,500 MW resource value.

Photo credit: Mike Trujillo
Renewable Energy Planning – site (4) – South Conejos School District

- Case study – South Conejos School District
- Lot was identified as a great location to elevate panels above parking.
- Create shade for a summer farmers’ market.
- Approximately four miles north of proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ.

Photo credit: Mike Trujillo
CCCW Would like to initiate the following collaborative planning effort in Conejos County during 2012

Potential Key Stakeholders:
• Town of Antonito
• Town of Romeo
• Town of Manassa
• Town of La Jara
• Town of Sanford
• Conejos County Chamber of Commerce
• Conejos County
• CCCW
Potential Utilization of Conejos County Renewable Energy Working Group Information

Conejos County Renewable Energy Development

SLV Collaborative Efforts

Discussions with Policy Makers

Conejos County Renewable Energy Master Plan

NEPA Comments

Conejos County Planning Commission

Municipal Renewable Energy Development
Attachment C
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Detilla Gulch</th>
<th>Four Mile East</th>
<th>Los Mogotes East</th>
<th>Antonito Southeast</th>
<th>Miles in Length/Width</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elk Overall Range</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elk Winter Range</td>
<td>496 Acres</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>5,442 Acres</td>
<td>5,737 acres Western Half- 3.47 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elk Severe Winter Range</td>
<td>Same Area as winter range above</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Same area as Winter range above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elk Summer Range</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>213 Acres NE Quadrant</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td>.60 miles long .98 miles width</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnison’s Prairie Dog Colonies</td>
<td>2 Areas</td>
<td>1,016 Acres, 2.42 Mile long, 1.6 mi width Southern Quadrant</td>
<td>518 Acres 2.82 Mile length, .43 mi width Upper left Quadrant</td>
<td>9.48 acres Along western border .42 Mi length .05 mi width</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mtn Lion Overall Range</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mule Deer Overall Range</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mule Deer Winter Range</td>
<td>1.127 acres</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>134 acres 1.94 mi length, .15 mi width Western border of Study area</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronghorn Overall Range</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronghorn Winter Range</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife Linkage Corridor</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bald Eagle Winter Forage</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bald Eagle Winter Range</td>
<td>746 acres, Eastern border Parcel, 3 mi radius</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Bear Overall Range</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
<td>Entire Study Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNHP Potential CA’s</td>
<td>Entire northern portion of study area 1.57 mi width 1.91 mile length</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attachment D
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates: Going into Costilla County from Conejos County’s County Road G and bearing 1.5 miles East of Kiowa Hill, which is situated at North 37 degrees 05.202’; West 105 degrees 48.337’ at elevation of
7754. Structures are said to have been USA Military-built structures built originally to house Japanese Prisoners of War (POW) in the 1940s

Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates

Signal Hill ¼ mile due East and North from N 37 degrees 05.202’; S 105 degrees 48.337’ at Elevation 7754 feet.
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates

At a point approximately 2.5 miles due South from North 37 degrees 02.550'; West 105 degrees 55.671’ at elevation of 7777 feet.
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates:
Possible Native American, Spanish, and/or Mexican symbols depicting some type of information is located on the “Picuris Trail”- East of present day La Florida, CO and bears South approximately 2 miles from North 37 degrees 02.550'; West 105 degrees 55.671’ at elevation of 7777 feet.

Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates: Approximately 2 miles from N 37 degrees 02.550'; West 105 degrees 55.671’ at elevation of 7777 feet.
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates: rock fissures situated in vicinity of North 37 degrees 05.202’; West 105 degrees 48.337’ at 7754 elevation.
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates: situated approximately at North 37 degrees 05.202’; West 105 degrees 48.337”.
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates: North 37 degrees 05.202’; West 105 degrees 48.337’ at 7754 elevation.
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates: at Picuris Trail approximately 2 miles from North 37 degrees 02.550'; West 105 degrees 55.671' at 7777 elevation.
Vicinity of Proposed Antonito Southeast SEZ - GPS Coordinates: N 37 degrees 05.202’ W 105 degrees 48.337” at 7754 elevation.
Symbol meaning

All photos are courtesy of CCCW.