

# Project Introduction for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project

## Project Overview

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The SunZia Southwest Transmission Project (Project) is composed of two 500-kilovolt transmission lines located across approximately 550 miles of Federal, State, and private lands between central New Mexico and central Arizona. The Project will transport up to 4,500 megawatts of primarily renewable energy from New Mexico to markets in Arizona and California. The permitted route originates at a planned substation in Torrance County, New Mexico, and terminates at the existing Pinal Central Substation in Pinal County, Arizona (see the attached Project maps). The Project traverses Lincoln, Socorro, Sierra, Luna, Grant, Hidalgo, Valencia, and Torrance counties in New Mexico and Graham, Greenlee, Cochise, Pinal, and Pima counties in Arizona. The route has four segments:

- **Segment 1:** Pinal Central Substation to Willow Substation;
- **Segment 2:** Willow Substation to SunZia South Substation (Segment 2a in Arizona, Segment 2b in New Mexico);
- **Segment 3:** SunZia South Substation to New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (New Mexico Tech); and
- **Segment 4:** New Mexico Tech to SunZia East Substation.

Prior environmental documents include a Final Environmental Impact Statement (DOI-BLM-NM-0000-2009-0081-EIS) in 2013, a subsequent Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-NM-900-2015-1) and Finding of No New Significant Impact in 2015 to accommodate burial of approximately five miles of the transmission line in three locations within the White Sands Missile Range Northern Call-Up Area, a Record of Decision in 2015, and a Final Environmental Impact Statement in 2023. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a right-of-way grant to SunZia Transmission, LLC (SunZia) in 2016, authorizing use of a 400-foot-wide right-of-way across 183 miles of public lands administered by the BLM. To date, construction of the lines has not begun.

The current BLM-issued Record of Decision authorizes amendment of the existing right-of-way grant under the four components listed below. The amendments to SunZia's existing right-of-way are the scope of this Project, not the re-siting of the entire path for the previously authorized transmission line. The Record of Decision provides the rationale for the BLM's Selected Alternative and the BLM's decision to issue an amended right-of-way grant under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 for the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed Project facilities on BLM administered lands under certain terms and conditions. The Selected Alternative is discussed in detail in the 2023 Final Environmental Impact Statement:

- **Component 1:** Localized Route Modifications 1–5, and the 2015 Selected Route (the no action alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement) for Local Route Modification 6 in the Pinal Central Area.
- **Component 2:** All access roads and temporary workspaces outside the granted right-of-way.
- **Component 3:** Alternative Route 2 with Subroute 2A-1 and Alternative Route 3 with Subroute 3A-1, which include crossing the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge as well as co-locating the proposed SunZia transmission line with the Western Spirit transmission line at the Rio Grande crossing. For Subroute 3A-1, the agency Selected Alternative includes Local Alternative 3B-2 to avoid two private residences in close proximity to the Project.
- **Component 4:** The 2015 Selected Alternative co-locates the ground disturbance associated with the high-voltage direct-current converter station (the SunZia West Substation) with the existing development and ground disturbance associated with the Salt River Project Pinal Central Substation.

The BLM Record of Decision also approves an amendment to the Socorro Field Office Resource Management Plan. The Resource Management Plan Amendment allows designation of a 400-foot-wide right-of-way for the Project through the BLM right-of-way avoidance areas, which required amending the existing Socorro Resource Management Plan.

The BLM analyzed SunZia's amendments and alternatives to the reroute of Segment 4 in the 2023 Final Environmental Impact Statement. The BLM also considered a no action alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (i.e., the BLM and other Federal agencies would not approve the localized route modifications, access roads, and temporary work areas outside the granted right-of-way, the Segment 4 reroute, and the new location for the SunZia West Substation).

## **Permits and Authorizations**

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The BLM will issue an amended right-of-way grant for public lands administered by the BLM. Construction or other surface disturbance associated with the amended right-of-way grant as reflected in the 2023 Record of Decision shall not occur until BLM issues a written Notice to Proceed. The BLM will issue the Notice to Proceed once requirements to receive a Notice to Proceed are met, including obtaining all Federal, State, county, local, and private authorizations or express written permissions necessary for the entire Project and complying with all requirements outlined in the right-of-way grant.

The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service will evaluate applications for authorizations of temporary construction and long-term maintenance and operation activities that will occur outside existing easement footprints and issue any required decisions separately. The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service will follow their own internal process for determining what permits are required for this project to cross the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge and whether or not to issue them. This includes any applicable compatibility determination. They may use the analysis in this EIS to help make those determinations and supplemental NEPA documentation may be necessary.

## **Project Status and Participants**

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The BLM was the lead Federal agency for the National Environmental Policy Act compliance. After careful consideration and analysis conducted in an environmental impact statement, the BLM will issue a right-of-way grant amendment for the Project for the Selected Alternative.

The BLM will work with SunZia and contractors to develop and finalize a construction Plan of Development. Once a Plan of Development is agreed upon, and other required terms and conditions have been met, the BLM will issue a Notice to Proceed to SunZia to authorize construction to begin.

The BLM will be the lead agency for the construction phase of the project. Transcon Environmental Consultant is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Compliance Inspection Contractor that will act on the BLM's behalf to monitor environmental and cultural compliance during the Project's construction. Galileo is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Contractor providing administrative support during construction.

Per National Environmental Policy Act guidelines, cooperating agencies are defined as agencies with legal jurisdiction and/or special expertise relating to the Project. The BLM invited 41 Federal, State, and local government agencies and 29 Native American Tribes to participate in the Project as cooperating agencies. Of those, 21 agencies accepted the invitation to be National Environmental Policy Act cooperators and seven agencies accepted the invitation to be Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act cooperators. These agencies participated in the National Environmental Policy Act process to the level appropriate for their jurisdiction or expertise, providing information within their expertise, assisting with analysis as requested by the BLM,

participating in meetings, and reviewing administrative drafts of National Environmental Policy Act documents.

On July 29, 2021, this project became a Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act project. This status means the Project was more closely monitored by Federal agencies and the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council at the national level. Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act is a coordinated framework designed to enhance coordination, transparency, predictability, and accountability of Federal environmental reviews and authorizations for large, complex infrastructure projects in the United States. The Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance invited Federal agencies to become Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act Cooperating Agencies (see Table 1 below). The project can be viewed on the Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act Dashboard at <https://www.permits.performance.gov/permitting-project/sunzia-southwest-transmission-project>.

**Table 1. Current Cooperating Agencies**

Agency	National Environmental Policy Act Status	Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act Status*
<b>Federal</b>		
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation	-	Participating
Department of the Army, Fort Huachuca	Cooperating	-
Department of the Army, White Sands Missile Range	Cooperating	-
USDA Forest Service (Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands)	Cooperating	Cooperating
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Cooperating	Cooperating
U.S. Department of Defense Siting Clearinghouse	-	Cooperating
U.S. Department of Energy	Cooperating	-
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 6	-	Cooperating
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Cooperating	Cooperating
U.S. National Park Service	Cooperating	Cooperating
<b>State</b>		
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Cooperating	-
Arizona State Land Department	Cooperating	-
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish	Cooperating	-
New Mexico Office of Military Base Planning and Support	Cooperating	-
New Mexico State Land Office	Cooperating	-
<b>Local</b>		
Belen, New Mexico	Cooperating	-
Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District, New Mexico	Cooperating	-
Graham County, Arizona	Cooperating	-
Grant County, New Mexico	Cooperating	-
Lincoln County, New Mexico	Cooperating	-
Luna County, New Mexico	Cooperating	-
Pinal County, Arizona	Cooperating	-
Socorro County, New Mexico	Cooperating	-
Valencia County, New Mexico	Cooperating	-

\*Only Federal agencies were invited to become Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act Cooperators

The BLM invited Native American Tribes to engage in Nation-to-Nation consultation in December 2020. The BLM will continue to consult with appropriate agencies as required by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and other entities as required by law and regulation.

The BLM published the Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* on June 4, 2021, informing the public of the BLM’s intent to prepare an environmental impact statement. The BLM hosted three virtual public scoping meetings during the 32-day public scoping period to provide the public information and answer questions.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, the BLM prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement to analyze the potential environmental impacts associated with the Project. A Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was published in the *Federal Register* on May 2, 2022. The BLM provided a 90-day public comment period to collect public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Three virtual public meetings were held during the comment period. The BLM received 12 public comment documents during the 90-day comment period. The documents contained 70 individual comments with 36 substantive comments. Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement received from the public and internal BLM review were considered and addressed in Appendix I (Draft Environmental Impact Statement Public Comments and Responses) of the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Public comments resulted in corrections or the addition of clarifying text but did not significantly change the Environmental Impact Statement analysis.

The BLM received nine protest letters during the 30-day protest period ending on March 19, 2023. The protest period was established in accordance with 43 Code of Federal Regulations § 1610.5-2. The BLM evaluated all protest letters to determine which protest letters were complete and timely, and which persons held standing to protest. Of the nine letters received, six met these criteria. Three letters were dismissed from consideration due to lack of standing. Three of the nine timely filed protests were dismissed because they provided comment but did not present valid issues. Three of the letters had valid protest issues regarding the following topics: consistency with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997; unnecessary and undue degradation; impacts analysis; range of alternatives; reasonably foreseeable future actions; public involvement; and Section 106 consultation-Tribal consultation. Each of these three protests was denied. The New Mexico Governor’s Office provided consistency review comments on April 13, 2023. The comments indicated the SunZia Final Environmental Impact Statement and the amendments it would make to the existing approved route for the SunZia Project provides consistency between BLM resource management plans and applicable State laws, policies, and programs. The State of New Mexico stands in support of the BLM’s February 17, 2023 Final Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendments for the SunZia Project.

## Jurisdictions Crossed

Federal and State jurisdictions that each of the four selected components crosses:

**Table 2. Jurisdictions Crossed**

Amendment Element	BLM Office	State Lands and Counties	Other Federal
Component 1- Localized Route Modifications	Las Cruces District Office and Socorro Field Office	New Mexico: Hidalgo, Luna, Sierra, and Socorro counties.	n/a
Component 2-Access Roads and Temporary Work Areas Outside the Granted Right-of-Way	Las Cruces District Office, Socorro Field Office, and Safford Field Office Tucson Field Office	New Mexico: Hidalgo, Grant, Luna, Sierra, and Socorro counties. AZ: Greenlee, Graham, Cochise, Pima, and Pinal counties.	n/a
Component 3-Segment 4 Reroute	Socorro Field Office	New Mexico: Socorro, Torrance, and Valencia counties.	Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge

Component 4-SunZia West Substation	n/a	Arizona: Pinal County	n/a
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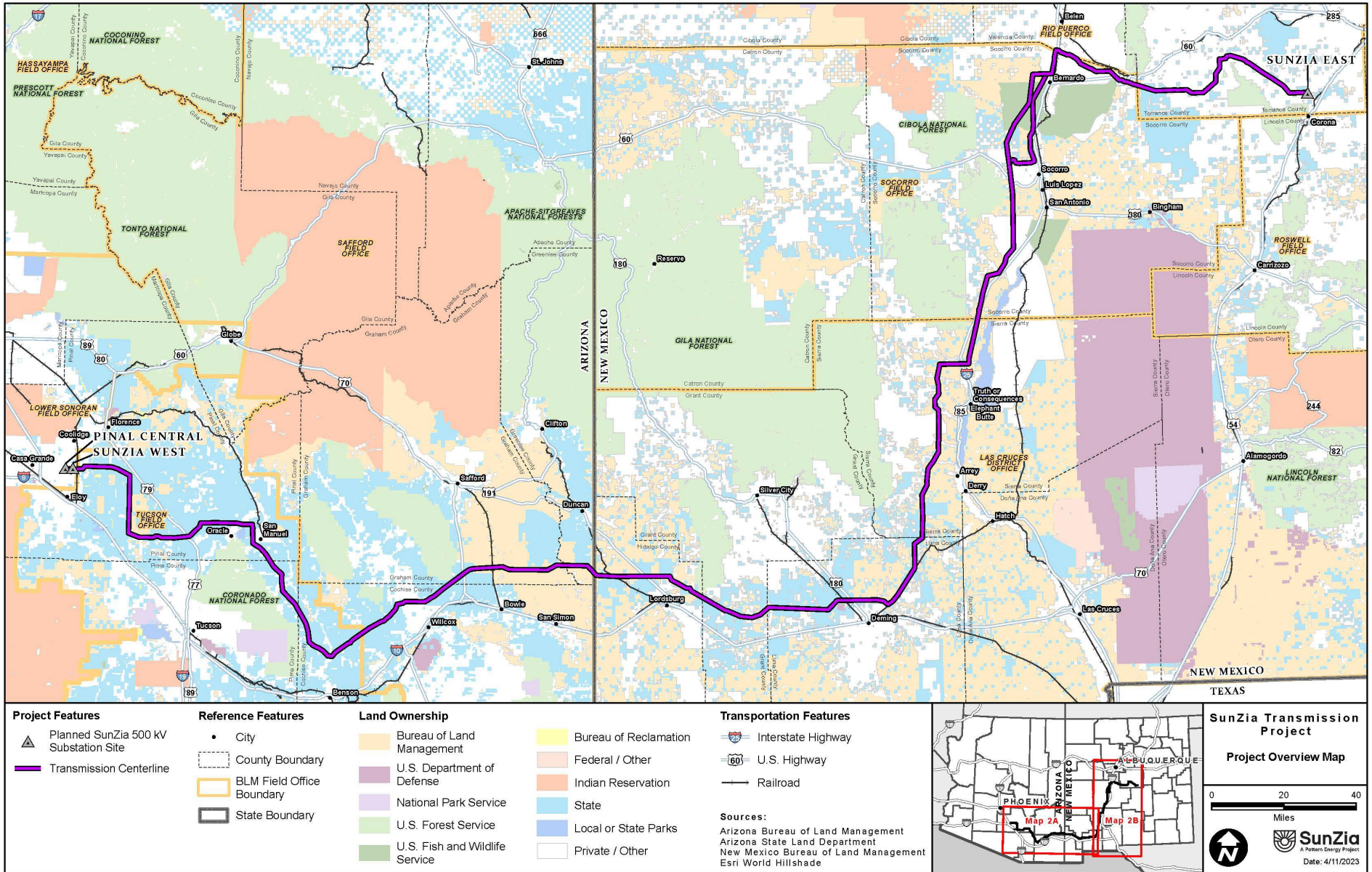
**For More Information**

Virginia Alguire, Project Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 505-954-2199

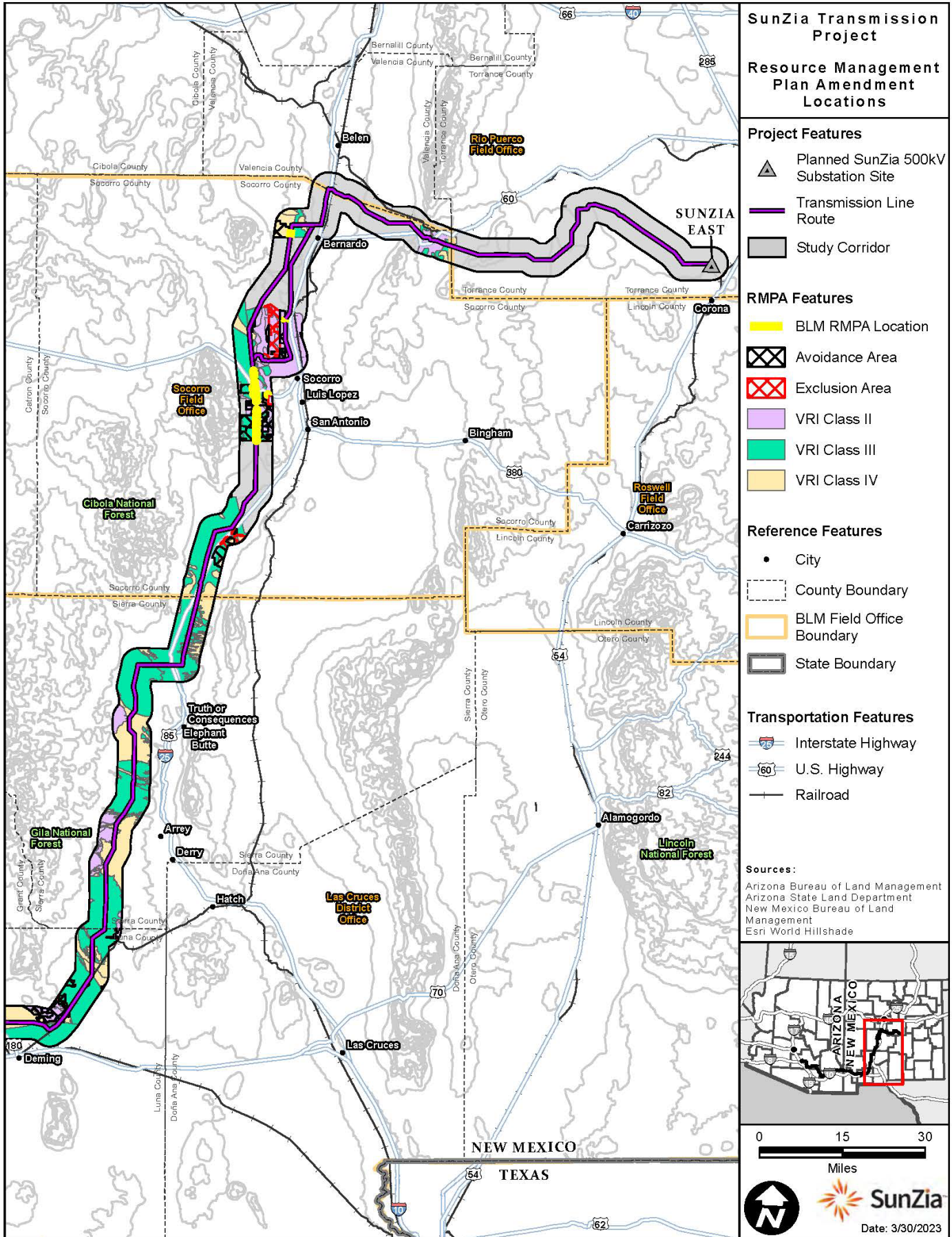
BLM Website: <http://ow.ly/HEkm5OMxXbG>

Project Map: See the next two pages.

# SunZia Southwest Transmission Project Overview Map



# SunZia Southwest Transmission Project Resource Management Plan Amendment Map



## SunZia Transmission Project Resource Management Plan Amendment Locations

- ### Project Features
- ▲ Planned SunZia 500kV Substation Site
  - Transmission Line Route
  - ▭ Study Corridor

- ### RMPA Features
- ▭ BLM RMPA Location
  - ▭ Avoidance Area
  - ▭ Exclusion Area
  - ▭ VRI Class II
  - ▭ VRI Class III
  - ▭ VRI Class IV

- ### Reference Features
- City
  - - - County Boundary
  - ▭ BLM Field Office Boundary
  - ▭ State Boundary

- ### Transportation Features
- Interstate Highway
  - U.S. Highway
  - Railroad

**Sources:**  
 Arizona Bureau of Land Management  
 Arizona State Land Department  
 New Mexico Bureau of Land Management  
 Esri World Hillshade

