



## U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich's Work to Deliver on the Promise of the SunZia Transmission Project

### Overview

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After more than a decade and a half, the SunZia Transmission Project — one of the largest energy infrastructure projects in the Western Hemisphere — has become fully operational. It is a milestone achievement for U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, who has been working throughout his tenure in Congress toward this moment, to help ensure that SunZia can generate affordable, American-made clean energy in New Mexico, invest billions of dollars across the state, and create high-quality jobs New Mexicans can build their families around.

SunZia, owned and operated by Pattern Energy, is a 550-mile transmission line spanning New Mexico's Torrance, Lincoln, and San Miguel counties. It will deliver up to 3,650 megawatts (MW) of energy and generate an estimated \$20.5 billion in economic benefits for New Mexico and the Southwest. The project supported more than 2,000 construction jobs and will create more than 100 permanent jobs as it begins full operations.

<b>550 Miles</b> Transmission Length	<b>3,650 MW</b> Clean Energy Capacity	<b>2,000+</b> Construction Jobs	<b>\$20.5 Billion</b> Economic Impact
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### Timeline of Senator Heinrich's Actions on SunZia

#### 2009 - 2012: Heinrich's Early Support for SunZia, Mediating Disputes Between Federal Agencies

Heinrich's involvement with SunZia dates back to when the project's permitting process first began in 2009. As a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Heinrich worked with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to move the project through the complex federal review process.

In 2011, the Obama administration created the Rapid Response Team for Transmission (RRTT) to accelerate permitting for major transmission infrastructure projects. [SunZia was selected as](#)

[one of seven nationally significant transmission projects](#) for expedited federal coordination and review.

In May 2011, the DoD approved the BLM's preferred route for the SunZia Transmission Project, provided that a portion of the alignment was shifted farther north to address military concerns. Two months later, in July 2011, the DoD Siting Clearinghouse assigned the project a "green" status, signaling that the route was considered acceptable — so long as those conditions were met.

Despite DoD approval, White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) continued throughout 2011 and into 2012 to advocate for several alternative routes. These alternatives were examined by the BLM during the environmental review process but were ultimately rejected due to unavoidable conflicts with other federal lands and proximity to residential areas.

Following the [publication](#) of BLM's draft environmental impact statement (EIS), in May 2012, the DoD reversed their earlier position to align with WSMR and announced that they could no longer support the preferred route, citing concerns that the transmission line would interfere with missile-testing operations.

Heinrich engaged both DoD and WSMR to try to reach a resolution.

### **2013: Heinrich Presses to Keep Permitting Process On-Track**

After the BLM [published](#) its final EIS in June 2013, Heinrich [sent a letter pressing](#) then-Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell to keep SunZia on track and not reopen the EIS. Heinrich also requested assurances from the DoD and WSMR that their preferred route would still be acceptable to them in the future.

In September 2013, Heinrich [published an op-ed](#) in the Las Cruces Sun-News making the case for a timely decision by the BLM to permit SunZia. That same month, Heinrich [requested](#) the DoD utilize its research and development laboratory, MIT Lincoln Laboratory, to look at the concerns raised by WSMR and examine potential changes to test protocols that would allow the DOD to adapt to the presence of a new transmission line. At Heinrich's request, the DoD [commissioned the study](#).

### **2014-2015: Heinrich Secures DoD Approval, BLM's First Record of Decision**

In March 2014, MIT Lincoln Laboratory completed its classified study and briefed Heinrich on potential mitigation strategies. Heinrich stated that the briefing identified "pragmatic solutions" and urged the DoD to make the unclassified results of the study available to the public. Heinrich further urged the Obama administration to move forward with the record of decision (ROD).

In May 2014, Heinrich [announced](#) that a compromise was reached between the DoD and BLM that would allow for the SunZia project to move forward. The compromise [required](#) that a total of five miles of the route be buried to eliminate conflicts with training and weapons testing in the Northern Extension Area of WSMR.

In January 2015, Heinrich [joined](#) Secretary Jewell, then-Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations, Energy, and Environment Katherine Hammack, then-U.S. Representative Ben Ray Luján, and the BLM to announce a ROD approving the SunZia Transmission Project.

## **2017 - 2020: Heinrich Includes Local Conservation Groups to Address SunZia Route Concerns**

In 2017, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission [dismissed](#) SunZia's application because it determined that SunZia had not provided enough specific information about where the transmission line would be located. Rather than deny the project outright, the commission dismissed the application and allowed SunZia to resubmit it with more detailed route information.

From 2018 to 2020, Heinrich broadened stakeholder engagement around the SunZia project, bringing conservation groups — including Audubon Southwest, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, and New Mexico Wild — to the table to help identify solutions and evaluate potential transmission line route adjustments.

Heinrich also worked with federal agencies and project developers to consider route modifications to address ongoing WSMR concerns, environmental conflicts, and new issues that arose since the BLM's original ROD.

In December 2020, SunZia amended its application to its route proposal, shifting it away from WSMR's Northern Call-Up Area and offering several alternative routes near the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge for consideration and public comment. SunZia also conducted research on sandhill cranes, and — based on that research — moved the power line to the place to minimize interference with the birds, and agreed to illuminate the line to make it more visible to birds. It also purchased and donated an old farm property and the accompanying water rights so a wildlife refuge could rebuild habitat for the birds.

Local conservation groups supported the new route options because the lines followed existing transmission corridors through the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, reduced the need to disturb new land, minimized impacts on sensitive wildlife habitat, and helped to protect the Sierra Ladrones Wilderness Study Area.

## **2021 - 2023 Heinrich Secures Commitments & Key Approvals to Advance SunZia Toward Construction**

In June 2021, Heinrich [secured](#) a commitment from Tracy Stone-Manning, the Biden administration's nominee to lead the BLM, to ensure that SunZia staid on track to meets its schedule. Around the same time, approvals from New Mexico and Arizona regulators helped advance the project's updated route and move it toward construction.

In April 2022, the BLM [released](#) an updated draft EIS and opened a 90-day public comment period on proposed changes to the SunZia project. Heinrich [welcomed](#) the development as a key milestone in advancing federal review of the revised route.

In May 2023, the BLM approved SunZia's revised route and project updates through an amended ROD. Heinrich welcomed the decision, following his continued engagement to ensure the timely consideration.

## **May - June 2023: Heinrich Introduces Legislation to Improve Federal Permitting for Transmission Projects**

In March 2023, during the American Council on Renewable Energy (ACORE) Policy Forum, Heinrich [pledged](#) to introduce federal legislation to reform the transmission permitting process.

In [May](#) and [June](#) 2023, Heinrich introduced legislation to improve how the federal government permits, plans, and pays for transmission infrastructure — directly informed by the lessons learned from SunZia's journey through the approval process.

## **September 2023: Heinrich Helps Break Ground on Historic SunZia Project**

In September 2023, Heinrich [attended](#) the official groundbreaking of the SunZia Transmission Project in Corona, New Mexico — joined by former-Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland and former-Senior Advisor to the President John Podesta. The ceremony marked the start of physical construction on what will become the largest renewable energy infrastructure project in U.S. history.

At the groundbreaking, Heinrich [stated](#) that, “SunZia will have a massive economic impact in New Mexico, creating thousands of jobs in our rural communities, while also bringing us one huge step closer to meeting our climate goals and conserving wildlife habitat. That’s why I fought hard for this project through a whole series of obstacles, and it's why I’m thrilled to welcome the start of construction. The proof is everywhere: the climate crisis is here, and it is the greatest threat we face. But solving the climate crisis by building out clean energy infrastructure like SunZia will also be the greatest economic opportunity of our lifetime.”

## **2024: Heinrich Marks Milestones in New Mexico’s Growing Clean Energy Industry**

In his April 2024 [keynote address](#) at the first ever Business to Business Electrify New Mexico event, Heinrich highlighted SunZia as a centerpiece of New Mexico's clean energy economy, noting that the state is positioned to remain at the center of clean energy innovation.

In May 2024, Heinrich [participated](#) in a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the production of the first wind towers coming off the Arcosa Wind Towers manufacturing line in Belen New Mexico. Many of Arcosa’s wind towers are being used as part of the SunZia project.