



January 10, 2025

Sandoval County Commission – District 1

Attn: Katherine A Bruch

P.O. Box 40

Bernalillo, NM 87004

To the Sandoval County Commissioners:

I am writing to you as the president of Scenic America, the nation's only 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated solely to the promotion, preservation, and protection of America's scenic beauty. In our over forty years of operation, we have been on the forefront of advocacy and education for many issues that directly affect the beauty and character of our communities. We have built a reputation as an organization that can quickly and effectively organize and activate a motivated group of supporters for or against issues of importance.

Scenic America has long been an advocate for the protection and enhancement of our nation's scenic byways, as evident in our support of the National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP). When funding lapsed and its designation process disappeared in 2012, we fought to reinstate the program. We were instrumental in the passage of the *Reviving America's Scenic Byways Act* of 2019 and have since helped secure nearly \$50 million in funding for the NSBP. We are considered the program's foremost advocate at the national level and work tirelessly to ensure continued funding via the appropriations process in Congress.

We have long supported America's byways at the national, state, local, and Tribal levels. Therefore, we want to express our concerns about the proposed solar project on the Turquoise Trail National Scenic Byway. While we support renewable energy and understand the importance of transitioning to sustainable power sources, we also believe in responsible siting practices that respect the scenic, cultural, and economic value of America's cherished landscapes.

The Turquoise Trail, a National Scenic Byway, is renowned for its breathtaking views of the Sandia and Ortiz Mountains, its rich cultural history, and its ability to draw thousands of visitors annually. Projects like the proposed solar development, which would significantly alter the landscape and visual experience, risk undermining the intrinsic qualities that make this byway special.

Scenic byways, such as the Turquoise Trail, play a vital role in enhancing quality of life for residents while driving sustainable economic growth through tourism. Visitors are drawn to the unspoiled vistas and rural character, spending money on local accommodations, dining, and attractions, which supports small businesses and creates jobs. Byways also preserve the natural and cultural heritage of their regions, fostering community pride and environmental stewardship through educational and recreational opportunities. However, the visual disruption caused by the proposed 2.8-square-mile solar facility, particularly its visibility from elevated points along the Turquoise Trail, threatens to spoil view, thus deterring tourism and diminishing these critical economic and cultural benefits.

We urge the commission to recommend relocating this project to a more suitable site away from the byway's viewshed. New Mexico offers vast stretches of land ideal for solar development that do not compromise its scenic or cultural treasures. Such a relocation would balance the need for renewable energy with the equally critical need to protect landscapes that hold significant cultural, ecological, and economic value.

We stand ready to work with stakeholders to identify alternative locations that can meet renewable energy goals while safeguarding the visual integrity of the Turquoise Trail. Together, we can ensure that New Mexico remains a leader in both renewable energy and scenic preservation. Your influence and decision-making hold significant weight, and we believe that with your support, we can ensure a balanced approach to development that respects and integrates the beauty of the landscape.

Sincerely,



Mark Falzone  
President, Scenic America