

I'm appalled that Keys Energy [Services] is actually considering planting ugly poles and stringing electrical lines on pristine No Name Key. I know several people who live on that island, and they've been doing just fine for years using clean, renewable solar energy.

OK, so there are some residents who want conventional pole and line power from Keys Energy. Why? Did they buy property on an off-the-grid island not knowing what off-grid meant? Are they too lazy to maintain their solar systems? Do they have future plans to redevelop No Name with fancy McMansions?

To Keys Energy I say leave No Name alone, and let the malcontents move somewhere else.

Harvey Server Key West

Who is behind move to put island on grid?

At a time when clean energy conservation is more critical than ever to the Florida Keys -- think rising gasoline prices or the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico -- the Keys Energy Services board of directors is considering an electrical line extension agreement to No Name Key at its meeting Wednesday. If approved, a handful of people will destroy a model solar community of 43 households, where the existing homeowners bought property knowing full well that the island was not serviced by utilities.

Who are the forces behind such a counterproductive move? One that not only affects the island's property owners committed to non-polluting energy, but a move that also affects the wildlife on the island's 1,200 acres, of which more than 75 percent is held in public land conservation.

Equally disturbing, the Keys Energy staff and board are forging ahead without approval from the Monroe County board of commissioners. They would even be defying a summary judgment by Circuit Judge Richard Payne in 2002, when he ruled that a then pro-electric group had "no property right to have electric power extended to their homes on No Name Key."

You just have to wonder who is benefiting from this action, and why, in an age of new technology, where tidal- and wind-harnessing methods of energy can produce low-cost, efficient power, is oil-burning electricity needed on an island that hasn't needed -- or wanted -- it in the past?

Barbara Bowers Key West

Let Keys Energy know your opinion

There is a solar community we all know about, made up of people who want to live the green dream. The electric companies are always talking about how to go green; always saying what they are doing to be greener, what we can do to be greener.

This is a time where the whole country is moving towards being less dependent on foreign oil. This country is trying to be ecologically responsible, not wasteful -- yet look at what Keys Energy [Services] is trying to do to this solar community on No Name Key.

Keys Energy is going to be voting at 5 p.m. Wednesday at the corner of James and Grinnell streets whether to go against our Monroe County comprehensive plan, county rules and put up overhead power lines on this unique, exceptional, charming, historical and environmentally sensitive barrier island. Overhead power poles will destroy what this island represents.

This is a step backwards, in my humble opinion. We are asking that Keys Energy live up to its

so-called "green" reputation. We are asking you to leave this island alone; do not do this to this solar community. Please.

Please call or email Keys Energy Services and voice your opinion. ...

Kay Thacker Key Largo

Develop an alternative to the power grid

The solar community on No Name Key -- just off Big Pine Key -- is the only all-solar community on a separate island in the Florida Keys. Its utilities are self-contained and sustainable with solar energy and cisterns. It is a lovely, quiet, beautiful place. The view is not broken with electric poles and wires.

This solar community is a treasure which Keys Energy Services (KEYS) could use as a model and laboratory to move away from polluting, fossil-fuel generated electricity and toward the KEYS motto -- Growing Greener Every Day.

For KEYS to do business as always and hook everyone who requests it up to the grid is being stuck in the 1900s. KEYS should develop clean, sustainable electric sources for those on No Name Key requesting electric service.

Shirley Freeman Key West

Keys Energy Services should reject extension of grid to No Name Key

By MARK SONGER Guest Columnist

Last Stand is proud to support the many residents of No Name Key who are models of sustainable living. These families have always lived without commercial electric and water service. Instead, they rely on solar energy and cisterns to support a lifestyle in harmony with nature.

Those of us who do rely on commercial electricity and water would do well to emulate the conservative practices of this community, not only to minimize our monthly bills but to relieve the strain on the distribution infrastructure and scarcity of water in the Biscayne Aquifer.

Despite protections in the Monroe County comprehensive plan and code, and the objections of those citizens who want to preserve the example of a community living "off the grid," a decision by Keys Energy Services board on March 23 may irreparably change life on this island.

Last Stand urges the board of Keys Energy Services to reject the "electric extension agreement" for No Name Key.

No Name Key is a substantially undeveloped 1,200-acre island connected by a county-owned bridge to Big Pine Key, and has never been "on the grid." The island is the focus of major public conservation interests, with more than 75 percent of the land in public ownership as conservation land, which provides habitat for seven federally listed endangered species. County, state, and federal regulations weigh against changes.

Well over 95 percent of No Name Key is designated as a Coastal Barrier Resources System unit by the federal government.

The Monroe County comprehensive plan requires the county to "take actions to discourage private development in areas designated as units of the Coastal Barrier Resources System." The law implementing this plan prohibits the extension of electric service to lands designated as units of the Coastal Barrier Resources System.

At its Dec. 15 meeting, the Monroe County Commission took three actions directly affecting Keys Energy's project to extend electric service to No Name Key: 1) denied Keys Energy's request for easements across county-owned lots; 2) refused to amend the comprehensive plan and land development regulations to allow the extension of utility services to No Name Key; and 3) directed its legal staff to file an action for declaratory judgment to clarify and resolve any issues raised by the Keys Energy project.

The requested judge's opinion will not be the first legal opinion on bringing electric service to No Name Key. In a June 2002 summary judgment, Circuit Court Judge Richard Payne ruled: "The plaintiffs (an earlier No Name Key pro-electric group) have no property right to have electric power extended to their homes on No Name Key." Judge Payne cited the Monroe County comprehensive plan and Chapters 163 and 380 of the Florida Statutes as the basis for his ruling.

We see many No Name Key residents living a normal life relying only on solar energy. We know that all these property owners were aware when they purchased their homes that there was no commercial electrical service.

When the homes were originally permitted, an alternative to commercial electric service existed. Recent developments in solar energy and investment incentives have provided much more cost-effective solutions to generators powered with fossil fuels.

For these reasons, we cannot see proof of a compelling public interest that commercial electric service is required.

Instead, we see a compelling public interest to encourage all residents living in the Coastal Barrier Resources System to adopt sustainable solar energy production and cooperate to maximize the efficiency and utilization of energy created in the community. We see a compelling public interest to preserve No Name Key and its sensitive habitat.

Last Stand asks the Keys Energy Services board members to respect the reasons these protections for No Name Key were established, to respect the actions of the Monroe County Board of County Commissioners and to reject the extension of electrical service when this item is considered at the March 23 meeting.

Mark Songer is president of Last Stand, a Key West-based civic organization whose stated mission is to promote, preserve and protect the quality of life in Key West and the Florida Keys, with particular emphasis on the natural environment.

Utility should set a conservation example

Attempts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions will fail unless people first alter their thinking and behavior. We need a shift to what can be called “sustainable thinking.” A growing number of private and public organizations and everyday citizens have shown that it is possible to think sustainably. We have a prime example of a group of people on No Name Key with a real energy vision. They have been living off the grid for many years, without compromising their life quality, and in fact enhancing it. The city of Key West developed a climate action plan through extensive community involvement, and Monroe County recently established a committee to do the same. We need to look at No Name Key’s solar community as a shining example and proudly point to them demonstrating how it can be done. We could use these pioneers as leaders and teachers to help educate about the “role consumers can play in reducing energy consumption and supporting renewable energy generation” — a direct quote from Keys Energy Services’ website. Keys Energy Services should be applauded for their partnership with government agencies — constructing a solar demonstration on the roof of the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center in Key West, supporting renewable technologies by showing the use of a “peel and stick” solar system that generates electricity with a thin film solar panel mounted to the rooftop using an adhesive material. It would be inspiring for the rest of the country if Keys Energy would embrace the concept fully and lead the way by really increasing energy conservation and efficiency. For example, by installing the smartest street lights on the planet using clean nonpolluting “ecotricity” from the sun and enhancing our only solar community instead of pondering the destruction of this shining example by connecting them to the grid.

Erika Biddle Key West

Ask utility board to study grid alternatives

As the whole world watches in horror at the nuclear disaster happening in Japan, it's very disappointing that Keys Energy Services wants to forge ahead to bring utility lines to No Name Key. How many energy-related disasters will it take before we realize that large-scale centralized power sources are not the answer? The solar community of No Name Key is a shining example (pun intended) and model of sustainable and self-sufficient living that draws scientists, school groups and eco-tourists to learn from what this group has accomplished. Once the power lines go up, we will have lost the intrinsic value of this living laboratory forever and it will be just another once-pristine landscape marred with ugly signs of "modern" living. It will also create precedent to destroy other pristine and natural places in the Keys. Keys Energy's 2010 strategic plan lists as one of its goals "Operate KEYS in an environmentally responsible manner" with several bullet points including "encourage the use of renewable energy." It's hypocritical that Keys Energy Services portrays itself as a green leader, while working to undo the model solar community of No Name Key, for no good apparent reason other than the political pressure of a handful of wealthy residents who knew they were purchasing property on an off-grid island. This resolution is premature and ill-advised. Why the rush? Have alternatives been considered to bring more off-grid power to No Name Key? With the hefty price tag that the pro grid people seem willing to pay

for utility poles, why not conduct a feasibility study to find out what alternatives are available?

These are good questions to ask all the Keys Energy board members, especially the three who are up for re-election in November: Bradford, Clark and Symroski.

Jody Smith Williams Key West

No Name Key is an example to others

I have visited No Name Key many times, and actually got the chance to house-sit for six weeks in one of the solar homes last March. I was pleasantly surprised to find all the amenities of home: heat, air conditioning, washer, dryer, etc. I was also very impressed by the fact a community existed that was able to provide its own water and electricity via cisterns and solar power. In our day and age of the much needed “greening” of America, it seems so archaic to take steps backward and extend electric service to No Name Key. This solar community should be allowed to remain as it stands — a fine example that the rest of this nation should replicate, not destroy.

Schaefer Roemmele Santa Cruz, Calif.