

Group requesting Environmental Impact Assessment for Heartland Transmission

Open letter to Premier Ed Stelmach,
Dear Honourable Premier:

Re: Appeal for Environmental Impact
Assessment of Heartland Power Line

On Jan. 5, 2011, I sent a letter, on behalf of our 8,000 RETA members, to the Honourable Rob Renner, Minister of the Environment, requesting a formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) under provincial legislation be required for the proposed Heartland Transmission Project. Although amendments to provincial legislation in 2008 exempted all power lines in Alberta from this formal EIA process, the Environment Minister retained his authority to require an EIA if he deems necessary.

Our reasons for making this request are outlined in detail in our letter to Minister Renner, but in summary include the following:

- The Heartland Line would be the largest ever built in Alberta (73-metre tall towers).
- Environmental impacts of such a large line have never been reviewed before in Alberta.
- There are many significant natural areas and wildlife species along AltaLink's and EPCOR's preferred and alternate routes that would be adversely affected by an overhead line.
- There are many documented negative impacts of overhead high voltage power lines on wildlife, livestock and vegetation.
- Many studies report strong causal correlations between overhead high voltage power line electromagnetic fields and dozens of diseases and other health problems.
- Electric shock, pipelines, lightning, tornadoes, ice storms and weather deterioration have been reported as overhead high voltage power line safety concerns.
- Overhead high voltage power lines depreciate neighbouring property values.
- The environmental information required by the Alberta Utilities Commission

tal impact assessments for transmission lines. We exempted those two years ago based on the fact we knew the impacts quite well."

- The government doesn't have to do a study, so it won't.
- The impact of the Heartland Transmission Project would be minimal.
- The impact of power lines is limited to land disturbance and the government does not believe a broader assessment is required.
- The requirement was removed because the department has a great deal of experience with power lines.
- There is no need for an assessment in this case because the environmental impacts will be examined during Alberta Utilities Commission hearings.

Premier, we find this incredulous. How can this Alberta Environment spokesperson be so callous about the environmental impacts of a project the magnitude of the Heartland Transmission Project? And, how can this Alberta Environment spokesperson pretend to know what the impacts are going to be of a power line that will dwarf any other existing lines in our province?

We subsequently received a response from the Honourable Rob Renner dated Jan. 10, 2011, in which he wrote, "Ultimately, the impact of transmission lines that would be under the purview of an Environmental Impact Assessment is well understood by Alberta Environment. As you note, the Government of Alberta maintains the authority to order Environmental Impact Assessments when required. In the case of the Heartland Transmission Project, we will not order a formal assessment because the impacts will be thoroughly addressed at the Alberta Utilities Commission hearing."

Again, we cannot believe that the Envi-

rently in Alberta?

While we have every confidence that the Alberta Utilities Commission will fairly consider information brought before it, only a formal EIA under provincial legislation would adequately study and consider the environmental, health, safety and socio-economic impacts for a proposal the magnitude of the Heartland Transmission Project.

We appeal to you to request your Environment Minister to require AltaLink and EPCOR to conduct a full, formal and proper Environmental Impact Assessment of the Heartland Line pursuant to the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act for reasons cited above and in our letter to Minister Renner.

The scientific literature documents many negative environmental, public health, public safety and socio-economic impacts of overhead high voltage power lines.

For example, regarding documented impacts of overhead power lines on birds, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated about 175 million bird deaths annually in the U.S. from collisions with overhead transmission lines, which is greater than the total number of birds killed by hunters.

A North Dakota study estimated 124 bird deaths per kilometre of power line per year. A similar study in the Netherlands estimated 214 bird deaths per kilometre of power line every year. If we apply this range to the proposed 66-kilometre Heartland Line, an estimated 8,184 to 14,124 bird deaths could occur every year.

Premier, by anyone's standards, this is not a minimal environmental impact as suggested by the Alberta Environment spokesperson. In fact this magnitude of bird deaths pales the 1,600 or so ducks reported to have been killed in Synnott's

removed this requirement in 2008 through legislative amendments. However, we plead with you to insist that AltaLink and EPCOR conduct a formal EIA to convince Albertans the provincial government cares about environmental, public health and public safety impacts of proposed overhead power lines that will be almost twice the height of any power lines ever built in Alberta.

The Heartland Line is the first of many your government has labeled "Critical Transmission Infrastructure". On behalf of our 8,000 members, and many other Albertans who are extremely concerned about these massive overhead power lines that will crisscross Alberta, affecting our environment and hundreds of cities, towns, villages and communities, we sincerely hope you and your government will make the right decision.

Yours truly,

Bruce Johnson

President, Responsible Electricity
Transmission for Albertans (RETA)

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