

GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT OF POWER LINES

The Myth:

Governments and regulatory bodies will ensure that people and the environment are protected from negative impacts of overhead high voltage power lines in Alberta.

The Facts:

- Amendments passed by the Alberta Government to the *Environmental Assessment (Mandatory and Exempted Activities) Regulation* in April 2008 exempt all electrical transmission lines from the requirement for an environmental impact assessment (EIA). Previously, EIAs for lines of 500kV or greater were mandatory and those less than 130kV were exempt.
- From April 2008 and on, in most cases, it is at the discretion of the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC 2009) to determine how much or how little environmental information even needs to be submitted by companies planning to build new high voltage power lines.
- As well, very few of the requirements under the Alberta Environmental Protection Guide for Transmission Lines (1994) need now be followed, including conservation and reclamation approvals or any public input on environmental concerns prior to construction of new lines.
- These recent changes mean that power line companies no longer need to submit detailed environmental studies to determine the impacts of their proposed power lines on the environment. These significantly reduced requirements will result in damages to the environment. For example, overhead high voltage power lines are known to kill tens of millions of birds every year in North America (U.S. Fish Wildl Serv 2002).



Alberta Legislature Building

- The *Land Assembly Project Area Act* was passed by the Alberta Government on April 29, 2009, in spite of protests by landowners concerned about losing their land rights. It will now be much easier for the Minister of Infrastructure to designate private land for future high voltage power lines. This will effectively sterilize such land for an indefinite period of time for development, improvement or sale until the Alberta Government purchased the land or selected another route for the power line.
- The *Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009* was passed by the Alberta Government on November 25, 2009, in spite of strong province-wide opposition. The amendments result in the Alberta Government unilaterally determining what is “critical transmission infrastructure” and eliminates any public input into determining whether new high voltage power lines are even necessary.
- For information on the working relationship between power line companies, regulatory agencies and the Alberta Government, see Nikiforuk (2007).



Legislative Chamber

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