

# Wachter group blasts AltaLink at hearing

## Local landowners say new power line and substation will hurt wildlife and land values

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Innisfail's Wachter group's vehement opposition to the proposed Hazelwood substation and power lines was front and centre at the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) hearings in Red Deer last week.

Generational land and acreage owners within the Wachter group spoke passionately of their love of the land, and the blight the proposed power lines and substation on Highway 54 would be if approved.

Ivo Wachter, whose group includes 24 families opposed to the Hazelwood substation and power lines, said concerned citizens want to protect their land for generations to come, noting there are many five-generation families living in the affected area.

"We already have one power line west of us in the area, and with this proposed line my property would be sandwiched between two major power carriers," said Keith Ible, who testified on March 17. The hearing began March 11. "I don't want to have to look out my kitchen window and see the lines and substation."

He added his concern that the value of his quarter section could fall significantly, noting that land values can drop as much as 30 per cent on land and homes situated near power lines and substations.

"Our quarter section of land is home to a variety of wildlife from foxes to bald eagles to protected species like burrowing owls," added Ible. "I have preserved several areas of our land in a natural state as a refuge for wildlife. As we are on the wildlife corridor between Napoleon and Hazelwood Lake, it is well used. AltaLink activity would disturb that and it will never come back."

His wife Mary said the humming she hears from the wires as she walks along her lane will only get louder if a new line and substation are built. She said there are additional concerns with potential effects of electromagnetic forces (EMF) radiation.

"Research has shown that leukemia is one side effect and I have to wonder why heavy-duty power lines are not allowed near schools and hospitals if they are not detrimental to our health," she told the hearing. "Why are they OK out here?"

She noted AltaLink holds to the position that EMF radiation is not dangerous as stated in their literature, despite a McGill University study that concluded there is danger from EMF radiation.

There was a concern over alleged misrepresentation by AltaLink during the consultation process with some landowners receiving only one visit then being bombarded with mail-outs from AltaLink.

"Many stakeholders were overwhelmed," said Wachter after his hearing testimony. "They dropped out as they could not handle information overload."

Harvey Lind added AltaLink officials told him before he joined the Wachter group that Wachter had 'no problem' with the proposed power lines and substation. Wachter denied this after his hearing testimony.

Other landowners commented on alleged improper consultation by AltaLink officials, as well as suspected trespassing by surveyors when they were explicitly not given permission to enter private land.

Kim Thompson told the hearing her signature was forged on a document that AltaLink presented at last week's hearings. "I did not sign the document my falsified signature apparently agrees to," she said during her testimony.

Wachter and Rick Tams also said they were worried that the arrival of AltaLink equipment on their lands will also bring clubroot contamination, which will affect their ability to grow healthy hay and sell it overseas.

"If we do end up with clubroot from infected AltaLink equipment, our product is non-sellable," said Wachter during his testimony. "I operate under standard operating procedures under which I disinfect my equipment when I move from field to field. I don't think AltaLink will do that, and as a result, they control my future."

Tams said he does not trust AltaLink to look after their rights-of-way even if they build on the preferred route. He won a land damage small claims case against the company years ago. Tams alleged AltaLink has not paid the amount required by law.

Meanwhile, Craig Teal, the Town of Innisfail's director of planning and operational services, testified the municipality objects to AltaLink's preferred route because it will jeopardize economic development in the south end of the town.

He said the northern alternate route would have less impact and would allow the town to plan for the future.

The AUC hearing concluded March 18. Commission members will spend up to 90 days from May 2 to consider the hearing testimony and additional written submissions. They can approve, refuse, or approve with conditions AltaLink's permit to build. If the commission requests more input on any alternate route, then AltaLink will consult with affected stakeholders and re-submit its proposal.