

Mission accomplished for STO: SWEPCO withdraws project application

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In a surprising turn of events, Southwestern Electric Power Co. on Tuesday afternoon withdrew its application to construct a high-voltage power line that would have run through the heart of Carroll County.

In a news release, SWEPCO said its decision to withdraw its application to the Arkansas Public Service Commission came after the company was notified by the Southwest Power Pool that the project was no longer necessary, based "on updated forecasts that show significantly lower electric demand than prior forecasts ..."

SWEPCO's announcement ended a long-running battle with the grassroots citizens group Save the Ozarks and left STO Director Pat Costner "a little stunned, but happy" Tuesday afternoon.

STO had fought the SWEPCO proposal for more than a year and a half, arguing that the project was unnecessary and would have a severe negative impact on Carroll County's environment and its tourism-based economy.

An ASPC judge had initially approved SWEPCO's plans to build the 345,000-volt line in Benton and Carroll Counties, but the ASPC agreed to a rehearing after both sides objected to the judge's ruling. SWEPCO preferred a different route for the power line than the one approved by the judge.

On Tuesday, Costner said Southwest Power Pool had obviously come to the same conclusion as STO regarding the need for the project.

"I think they ran the numbers again and found that we were right," she said.

Costner said Southwest Power Pool "has slammed the door" on the project.

"This means there will be no new application from anyone to build this project," she said.

Still, had Save the Ozarks not objected to the project from the outset, it likely would have moved forward.

"There's no question that we stopped it," Costner said. "That's inarguable."