

Concerns Over Wind Power Lines

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CLARENCE, IA – (CBS2/FOX28) Despite the nick name, ironically in this case, “Windy City” has nothing to do with the strength of the breeze blowing through town off from Lake Michigan. In fact, if abundant wind power blessed the city with big shoulders there wouldn’t be a battle brewing in Iowa’s cornfields. Rock Island Clean Line is in the middle of a \$2 Billion dollar project to string high voltage transmission lines from the wind farms of northwest Iowa to electric customers near Chicago. Clarence, Iowa sits right in the middle. In a bar and grill on the curb of Highway-30 running through town, Lisa Dircks can hardly contain her frustration, “ We feed the world, so don’t take our land away. “ She, along with Pam Hartwig and Wendy and Jerry Goldsmith are looking at signatures on a petition they’re circulating through town to stop the construction. The four are among more than one thousand Iowa landowners now pondering whether to accept one-time payments from RICL to secure a 200-foot wide lifetime easement across their properties in addition to payments for towers and access. Some farmers have accepted offers, some lucrative, reportedly for nearly \$20,000 per electric tower and up to \$100,000 for the easement. Jerry Goldsmith says it’s not worth it, “I personally hope it doesn’t get built anywhere because I don’t think it’s needed, I think there are a lot of other ways to get energy to the Chicago grid.” If it receives approval, the power lines would span nearly 30 miles of Cedar County. Jerry says the project would take good land out of production, the 130 foot towers and lines would restrict or eliminate the use of crop dusting planes on his ground and he says while it’s not proven, he worries about any health problems associated with the high voltage. Hartwig says she’s concerned there are too many loopholes in the agreements and that Rock Island Clean Line could come back later and ask for an even wider easement and more utilities on the properties. She says the towers and lines right on the edge of town would also limit Clarence from ever expanding to the west, “So yes land value will go down. Does anybody want to build next to that? No .. no. “ Beth Conley, spokeswoman for RICL readily admits the company is in the business of exporting power. Iowa now ranks in the top three states in the country for wind power production. She says in an emergency situation, the transmission lines could bring electricity back into Iowa, but the goal is to produce more wind power in Iowa and carry it to where it’s needed. The Goldsmiths, Hartwig and Dircks say out of all their concerns, there is one that makes them especially angry. It is possible, that landowners who refuse to an agreement with RICL will be forced to allow the transmission lines to cross their farms anyway. Jerry says that is his biggest fear, “ That ultimately we will not have any choice. That it will be forced upon us as landowners to take it under the rules of eminent domain. “ Hartwig says for a private company to come along and take a private piece of property is the worst kind of violation of rights, “ To have your land taken away, even if you don’t want it? I mean, I just see no right to that. “ The group says it knows it may have an uphill battle against the winds of change, but they will continue to spread the word and try to make people listen. Dircks says they’re not giving up by any means, “ That is what we want people to know, that it is not a done deal and do not sign any forms from Rock Island if they come by, because it is not a done deal. “ Conley says RICL has reached agreements with fewer than half of the Iowa landowners impacted by the power line proposal, but she adds that’s further along than they anticipated at this date. She says pending approval from the state and finished agreements with all landowners, the company hopes to move ahead with construction sometime in 2016.