

Clean Line proposal draws protest

Roy Faulkenberry Sequoyah County Times Dec 10, 2014
Editor

At least two area landowners have expressed some concerns for a proposed high-voltage, direct-current transmission line that is tentatively planned to come through Sequoyah County.

In a presentation at last month's luncheon of the Sallisaw Chamber of Commerce, Phillip Teel, manager of Clean Line Energy, said the company's focus in the coming months will be to focus on landowner concerns. Teel stated at that time that the best and cheapest of the various routes mapped out for transmission line, is the one coming through Sequoyah County.

That route could be fine-tuned by the Department of Energy, depending on an Environmental Impact Study. Clean Line Energy is proposing to deliver high-voltage, direct current wind energy from the panhandle of Oklahoma to the Tennessee Valley Authority. The lines will carry 600 kilovolts of electricity.

Sallisaw landowner Steve MacDonald is not so certain he wants the transmission lines coming across his property and he believes, by looking at route maps, that is exactly what will happen.

"I have several issues. Property values, for instance. My concern is we may see a 10 to 30 percent drop in property values," MacDonald said. "I'm also concerned I might not be able to sell my property. That should be a big concern to property owners."

MacDonald said as far as he knows there have been no studies to determine if there are any health issues involved with direct current transmission lines.

He wants to know how the project will affect his ad valorem taxes. "How is my property going to be appraised? Surely, my land will be appraised for less," MacDonald said.

"This area gets several tornadoes a year. What if a line goes down? Who takes care of that?" he said.

MacDonald said he is drafting a petition, primarily to present to area landowners and get the names of property owners that still haven't been told the exact route, and there is a Facebook blog called Block Plains and Eastern Clean Line: Oklahoma. Landowners or other concerned citizens can go to the Facebook page to get information or voice their concerns.

The biggest concern voiced on the Facebook page has been the question of eminent domain and whether or not Clean Line will be able to come in and take the land. While they believe Clean Line does not have the power to invoke eminent domain, some in the Facebook group fear Clean Line will be joined in the project by Southwest Power Administration and the Department of Energy, which they believe does have power of eminent domain.

"I think if this thing comes in, they should bury it (the transmission line)," said MacDonald.

Kathy Wilburne, another landowner who says she and her husband live "within shooting distance" of where the line will go in, believes the project is historically, environmentally and ecologically bad for the area.

A member of the Sequoyah County Historical Society, says there are historic sites of the Cherokees and family burial sites that have been in that area since before statehood. She said the route Clean Line is proposing would impact those sites.

"They just can't do this to the families that are homesteading out here and want to pass this legacy on to their children," Wilburne said. "They've told us, but we have seen nothing in writing about how careful they will be or how they will reclaim the land."

Wilburne said the group of landowners is anxiously awaiting an Environmental Impact Study they believe is scheduled to be released Dec. 12. She said she hopes the study will include information from the fish and game department.

She said landowners in the area are beginning to see the return of wild turkeys and eagles in the area, and she is afraid the transmission towers will disrupt migration patterns.

"I'm all for clean energy and the project is a good project, but just not for this area. No one wants to see their property torn up. I'm all for getting off fossil fuels, but not this way," Wilburne said.