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Cherokee Nation, Arkansas Quorum Courts Oppose Clean Line Project

By John Lovett

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The Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma recently joined a growing list of government entities to pass resolutions against the construction of a \$2 billion, 700-mile, high-voltage transmission line through Oklahoma and Arkansas to Tennessee.

Janelle Fullbright, deputy speaker of the of the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council, sponsored a [resolution](#) that was passed Tuesday “opposing the establishment of an energy line route by the Plains & Eastern Clean Line in Sequoyah County, Oklahoma located within the Cherokee Nation jurisdictional area.”

The Plains & Eastern Clean Line project is proposed to deliver 3,500 megawatts of wind energy from the Oklahoma Panhandle region to utilities and customers in Tennessee, Arkansas, and other markets in the Mid-South and Southeast. A 500-megawatt substation has been added to the plan.

“There is no benefit to us in any way,” Fullbright said of the transmission line. “We’re just seen as the pass through for a monstrosity that will lower our property value. Even if the proposed routes didn’t go right along the Trail of Tears and through our ceremonial ground, I’d be against it because we like to live in the country and not see anything out our back door.”

Quorum courts of [Crawford](#), Franklin, Johnson and Pope counties have also passed similar resolutions in the past week. The Pope County resolution states the proposed power line would be an “enduring eyesore to Arkansas” that will affect the “natural beauty” and damage property values with “little positive effect.”

Mario Hurtado, co-founder and executive vice president of development for Clean Line Energy, said they “take very seriously” the resolutions and are “paying attention” to assure questions are answered.

“It’s part of the process, and we’re committed to working with land owners and minimizing impacts to make it a better project,” Hurtado said.

Many public meetings with Clean Line have been held over the past year in Mulberry and Ozark. Over 7,000 information cards have been sent out recently, Hurtado said, to landowners along the proposed route and alternate routes. Comments received have ranged from positive to negative, he said. The project is in its fifth year.

The Plains & Eastern Line would facilitate a [\\$500 million investment in Arkansas](#), Clean Line states, with Van Buren’s Bekaert Corporation, Malvern’s General Cable and Little Rock’s LM Wind Power standing to gain business.

Grass Roots Effort

A public meeting with Block Plains & Eastern Clean Line, a group against the transmission line, will be held 4-7 p.m. today at Clarksville’s Foy Howard Community Center, 605 Lucas St., for residents who could be affected by the proposed routes of the transmission line. Another meeting will be held 5-7 p.m. Tuesday at Morrilton’s Rialto Theater. There will be discussion of the Department of Energy’s draft Environmental Impact Study that was [released in mid-December](#). No one from Clean Line or the Department of Energy is expected to attend the meetings.

The release of the draft EIS initiated a 90-day public comment period that is scheduled to conclude March 19. DOE will host 15 public meetings in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee and Texas during January and February of 2015. Based on the current schedule, Clean Line anticipates that DOE would issue a final EIS later in 2015. It will consider and respond to comments received regarding the draft EIS.

Jarrell Harry, who owns land in Crawford County near Alma and Mulberry where the power line is proposed to cut through, said the group [Arkansas Citizens Against Clean Line Energy](#) has sent over 300 letters with over 1,000 signatures to the Department of Energy in opposition to the proposed power line. The line would require a 150-foot to 200-foot right-of-way for towers that range from 110-feet to 150-foot tall, or 200 feet at river crossings, according to the [Clean Line proposal](#).

Harry has questioned many aspects of the project, from notification to landowners to the number of jobs the line would create.

Anti-Clean Line groups have other concerns related to the longevity of a possible eminent domain status, as well as potential health effects and impact on tourism. The line would cross the Mulberry River and scenic byways in Arkansas, according to the DOE's draft environmental impact study.

According to the World Health Organization, "there are no known health impacts from the EMF (electromagnetic fields) associated with a transmission line," Clean Line states.

Despite many [letters](#) to the Tennessee Regulatory Authority in opposition to the Plains & Eastern Clean Line, the TRA earlier this week approved a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Plains & Eastern Clean Line to allow the company to operate as a "transmission only public utility in Tennessee." Arkansas denied Clean Line public utility status in 2011. Hurtado said they are now "invested in the federal process." The company states in its [2010 proposal](#) that it meets the test for federal eminent domain through Section 1222 of the 2005 Energy Policy Act if it partners with the Southwestern Power Administration. Clean Line has not officially partnered with Southwestern Power Administration, Hurtado said.

No 'Demonstrable Need'

In his [November letter](#) to the TRA seeking denial of public utility status for the Plains & Eastern Clean Line, Dover resident Dave Ulrey of the group Block Plains & Eastern Clean Line — Pope, Johnson, Newton and Conway counties, states that he has not seen a "demonstrable need" for the transmission line considering the Tennessee Valley Authority is [already operating](#) at carbon reduction levels set for the year 2030. Clean Line Energy President Michael Skelly said in a new release Wednesday that Clean Line is "happy to take another step forward in the development of this important infrastructure project" and they "believe there is an essential role that affordable renewable energy can and should play in the energy mix for Tennessee and the greater Southeast."

Both Shelby County Tennessee and the City of Memphis expressed support for the development, construction and operation of the Plains & Eastern Clean Line, citing the investment in western Tennessee and the potential to create a renewable energy hub in the Greater Memphis area.

"This is great news for the economic climate in Tennessee," Al Bright Jr., chairman of the Economic Development Growth Engine for Memphis and Shelby County, said in the Clean Line news release. "Not only will low-cost, renewable energy benefit current business and residential utility customers, it will send another strong message of why potential companies should relocate to our state. ... It's going to help bring jobs to Tennessee."