

Transource Energy on Thursday announced the final route for the Sooner-Wekiwa Project, a new \$100 million, 76-mile electric transmission line in Oklahoma that Transource says is designed to save customers hundreds of millions of dollars in the coming years. The company announced the project in July and began a public input process that included both in-person open houses, such as one in August at Case Community Park, and virtual town halls. “Public input is essential to siting transmission lines,” Transource Director Todd Burns said last week in a news release. “We met with hundreds of people and considered their comments along with a host of natural, cultural and recreational resources that were identified in the process. “Ultimately, we were able to develop a line route that best balances the overall priorities and the need for reliable, affordable electricity.” But not everyone affected by the project sees it that way. Neva Alsip, who, with her husband, owns Country Gardens Farm, a cottage-esque Airbnb alongside an organic farm on 105 acres near Yale, dismisses the company’s characterization of that process. “They brought a train-carload of people down here from Columbus, Ohio, to give us a dog and pony show and to act sympathetic, and then they do what they were going to do anyway,” she said. The Southwest Power Pool awarded Transource, a partnership between Ohio-based AEP and Evergy, the bid to construct the electric transmission line in October 2020 to address deficiencies in the electric grid and improve consumer access to low-cost power, according to Transource’s news release. Called the Sooner-Wekiwa Project, it includes building 76 miles of 345-kilovolt electric transmission line from Oklahoma Gas & Electric Co.’s Sooner Substation in Noble County to American Electric Power-Public Service Company of Oklahoma’s Wekiwa Substation on the east side of 209th West Avenue about half a mile north of U.S. 412. OG&E and AEP-PSO will upgrade their respective substations to integrate the facilities into the grid. But it’s not the substations that trouble Alsip; it’s the power line. It would still be “coming across our property,” she said, noting that it and a KAMO Electric Cooperative power line that already bisects her land have regulations in place

that prevent building under the lines. Not that she thinks living under or eating food grown under high-voltage lines is anything anyone would want to do anyway. "Whenever people want to come here, they want it to be healthy," Alsip said, expressing concern about the electromagnetic radiation produced by the power lines. "Why not go down land that's already condemned for public use? Because they'd have more difficult negotiations with municipalities than using eminent domain," she said. "They're just using Oklahoma to provide electricity for other states." Transource community affairs representative Connie Smith said the company does look for opportunities to parallel infrastructure where it makes sense. "In fact," she said, "24.5 miles, or 32 percent, of the 76-mile final route parallel existing infrastructure like roads, railroads and existing transmission lines." The Southwest Power Pool said the project "on which construction is set to begin in the spring of 2024 and conclude in late 2025" will increase consumer access to more affordable power in Oklahoma as well as to customers in Arkansas, Missouri, Texas and Louisiana, providing an estimated \$16.8 million in savings during the first year and \$465.6 million over the next 40 years. Talk of savings only reminds Alsip of what she stands to lose, she said. "My great-grandfather homesteaded this place back in the late 1800s, and it's been in our family all of these generations," she said. Alsip's sister, Leslie Harrison, owns an adjacent 15 acres. The KAMO power line that already crosses their properties was built in the 1960s, Alsip said. "Our grandparents agreed to that," she said, "and they took a little check." But the electric companies "keep doing this, and they just eat up your property," she said. "They will ask for permission to survey property, but if you say no, the lawyers start bullying," Alsip said. "They only offer you a value they come up with for your land, and then your property is ruined for the rest of time. It just hits you in the gut as soon as you receive one of these letters," she said. "It's very frightening, and you start imagining everything you could lose." Alsip said a real-estate development

theyâ€™ve been working on that is reaching the final stages could fall victim to the project. â€œAEP is a behemoth public corporation,â€• she said. â€œAnd theyâ€™re using eminent domain to cross Oklahoma landownersâ€™ properties to bring very inefficient energy." Smith said Transource believes that landowners should be fairly compensated for the easement and that the company will work to reach a mutual agreement with landowners and only use condemnation as a last resort. Alsip told a reporter at the Transource open house at Case Community Center in August that the dispute ultimately might have to be settled in court. She said last week that she hopes to succeed with other methods first, such as appealing to the Southwest Power Pool and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Transource is â€œtrying to prove itâ€™s necessary. Weâ€™re trying to prove itâ€™s not necessary,â€• she said. â€œTheyâ€™re imagining that this is going to be good for the environment, but itâ€™s not.â€• Alsip said she would not be opposed to the project if Transource â€œtook better care to use routes that are more environmentally friendly and landowner friendly.â€• â€œIâ€™m a huge fan of wind energy and solar energy when used appropriately and not using eminent domain to take peopleâ€™s property.â€• Be the first to know

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