

When Transource Energy announced the final route recently for the Sooner-Wekiwa Project, a new \$100 million, 76-mile electric transmission line in Oklahoma, the company said public input had been “essential to siting transmission lines.” “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,” Transource Director Todd Burns said in a news release earlier this month. The public input process included both in-person open houses, including one held in August at Case Community Park in Sand Springs, and virtual town halls. “Ultimately, we were able to develop a line route that best balances the overall priorities and the need for reliable, affordable electricity,” Burns said. 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. The company in July announced the Sooner-Wekiwa Project “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 near Sand Springs. 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 recently, 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 last week that

the company does look for opportunities to parallel infrastructure where it makes sense. “In

fact,” she said, “24.5 miles, or 32%, 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 they’ve been working on that is reaching the final stages could

fall victim to the project. "AEP is a behemoth public corporation," she said. "And they're using eminent domain to cross Oklahoma landowners' 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 "trying to prove it's necessary. We're trying to prove it's not necessary," she said. "They're imagining that this is going to be good for the environment, but it's not." Alsip said she would not be opposed to the project if Transource "took better care to use routes that are more environmentally friendly and landowner friendly." "I'm a huge fan of wind energy and solar energy when used appropriately and not using eminent domain to take people's property." Featured video: [Subscribe to Daily Headlines Sign up!](#) \* I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy.

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