

Wind Power Proposal Irks Midwestern Farmers

Jim Salter, Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — The windy plains of Kansas could be a treasure trove in the nation's effort to harness clean energy, but a major proposal to move wind-generated electricity eastward is running into a roadblock: Farmers who don't want high-power transmission lines on their land.

Clean Line Energy Partners wants to spend \$2.2 billion to build a 750-mile-long high-voltage overhead transmission line. Towers 110 to 150 feet tall, 4-6 per mile, would carry lines with power generated by Kansas' modernistic windmill turbines through sparsely populated northern Missouri, through the cornfields of Illinois and to a substation in Sullivan, Ind. The exact route has not been finalized.

The idea is supported by environmental groups who say it is an opportunity to take a big step forward for an energy source that could reduce the nation's reliance on fossil fuels and cut air pollution. Clean Line has four other transmission line projects in the works in the West and Midwest.

All five still require regulatory approval. If all goes right, the Kansas-to-Indiana line — called the Green Belt Express Clean Line — could be operational by 2018, said Mark Lawlor, director of development for Clean Line.

"There are a whole host of wind developers who are ready to go but they don't have the ability to transmit the power," Lawlor said. "But like an oil or gas field that's remotely located, you've got to find a way to get that resource to market."

Clean Line says the project will be an economic boon, with all four states seeing new jobs for construction and local companies providing things like parts and concrete. Lawlor said consumers would benefit, too, by the new source of power that would drive down electricity costs.

Kansas figures to benefit the most. Clean Line projects that more than \$7 billion of new wind projects will be needed to meet demand created by the line, potentially creating thousands of new jobs in Kansas and making the state a hub of wind energy.

Randi Tveitaraas Jack, energy coordinator for the Kansas Department of Commerce, said the agency doesn't endorse individual projects, but that in general, "We're very supportive of the wind industry in Kansas and continued growth, and transmission is an important piece of that."

Both the property owner and the counties where the towers would be built stand to make money. A typical county could see \$800,000 annually in property taxes, Lawlor said.

Wind Power Proposal Irks Midwestern Farmers

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

As for property owners, compensation will depend on how much easement is needed, the value of the land and other factors. Lawlor gave an example of an easement stretching half a mile across land valued at \$5,000 an acre, housing two tower structures. The owner would get about \$45,500 for the easement and a one-time payment of \$18,000 for each structure — a total of \$81,500. Owners could also opt for smaller annual payments for the structures.

Yet many landowners have organized in opposition to Clean Line. They worry about whether the towers and lines will reduce property values, get in the way of farming operations like crop-dusting and irrigation, and even create health risks for those living so close to high-voltage wires.

"This is some of our best ground," said Kent Dye, 56, who farms about 7,000 acres in northeast Missouri's Monroe County. "This line — there's no proven need for it. There are no contracts to provide power, no contracts to sell on the other end."

Then there are property rights issues. Clean Line filed an application with the Missouri Public Service Commission in January for approval to operate as a public utility, a move that would grant eminent domain rights. Similar approval would be needed in Illinois. Clean Line already operates as a public utility in Kansas and Indiana.

Many along the route worry that a private company could simply take over land that in some cases has been in families for generations.

"We have sacrificed everything for this land," said Jennifer Gatrel, 33, who, along with her husband, Jeff, farms a 430-acre cattle ranch in western Missouri. "We don't go on vacation. We don't go out to eat. Everything we have is tied up in this land. The idea that somebody can come in and take it from us is appalling and it goes against what it is to be an American."

Lawlor said the company prefers not to use eminent domain and wants to reach agreements with landowners. He also cited studies showing that power lines and towers have no effect on property values.

"When they sit down and talk to us and get the information about the reality of the project, I think we're succeeding in clearing the air," he said.

Not as far as Gatrel is concerned.

"There are already significant barriers to farming," Gatrel said. "This would be another major barrier."

Source URL (retrieved on 09/18/2014 - 10:00am):

http://www.chem.info/news/2014/03/wind-power-proposal-irks-midwestern-farmers?cmpid=related_content