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Public Loses in Power Line Dispute

By Robert Trapp 9 hrs ago

Nice marketing on the part of Hunt Power, naming a big, ugly electric transmission line “green.”

Hunt Power’s quest to run a 33-mile 345 kV transmission line through the southern portion of Rio Arriba County continues. It began almost 10 years ago with filings and hearings and all the bureaucratic rigamarole that goes with running a monstrosity through many communities’ back yard:

The transmission line is one of the giant metal structures you see in urban areas. This one would carry a massive load from the Norton Substation in Santa Fe County, to the Ojo Substation in Rio Arriba County. The latter substation is in Chili on the Chama Highway.

The power traveling through the lines will not benefit Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative users at least not in the near future. We’ve got plenty of juice. We just get the benefit of the view.

The current bump in the road is Hunt officials listening to and reading comments from Rio Arriba and Santa Fe county residents. As expected, they’re not happy. Unfortunately, they’re comments won’t carry much weight.

That’s because if you want to talk about happy, that would be Pojoaque, Santa Clara and Ohkay Owingeh pueblos. The Verde line will run through all three pueblos. Most of the right-of-way Hunt seeks is through these three pueblos. And all are gleefully supporting the project while counting the money they’ll receive in easement payments.

We also will never know how that money was spent. Tribal leaders said at the Nov. 16 hearing the easement payments would support tribal members but we know that’s not been the case with casino revenue. Why will this be different?

Most of those who don’t care to look at or live near a huge power line live outside the pueblos. But they have little say in the matter.

Looking west, just outside the Española city limits, is an existing power line owned by Public Service Company of New Mexico. That line follows almost the same course as the proposed line, but can't be upgraded because PNM owns it.

It's not clear where the energy from the new line will go. It won't benefit those who will look at the lines daily.

This isn't a "not in my back yard" situation. This is a case of someone putting a dog kennel in your back yard, but you don't own any dogs. You hear them bark at night, catch the smell and have to look at the steel cages every day.

We all recognize the country's growing demand for power. Energy makes the economy move and allows healthy growth in a responsible way.

But to come into an area controlled by sovereign pueblos that refuse to hear the community, is wrong. Almost everyone in this equation will be affected in a negative way.

If the line is approved and constructed there will be two winners: Hunt Power and the powers that be in the pueblos receiving easement payments. The rest of us lose.