

Residents speak out against proposed transmission lines route

By JEFF GEARINO Southwest Wyoming bureau | Posted: Friday, June 18, 2010

KEMMERER -- Dick Walker grew up in Lincoln County, moved away for work and then returned to the area after retiring a few years ago.

He purchased a 120-acre lot in the scenic Commissary Ridge area -- which lies at the southern end of the Bridger-Teton National Forest in southwest Wyoming -- and built a modest summer home.

Unfortunately, Walker's spread now sits right between an existing transmission line corridor and the Bureau of Land Management's preferred route for PacifiCorp and Idaho Power's ambitious \$2 billion Gateway West Transmission Line project.

Instead of following the existing transmission corridor that runs from the Jim Bridger Power Plant in Sweetwater County, an approximately 30-mile segment of the proposed route traverses through the Commissary Ridge area.

"It's absolutely ridiculous to site these lines around houses, especially around homes that people have spent their entire life savings on," Walker told Gov. Dave Freudenthal during a town meeting Thursday night in Kemmerer.

"Nobody in their right mind wants to live under a power line ... our property values will drop and we won't be able to give these homes away," Walker said.

Walker joined about 100 Lincoln County residents attending the governor's third and final "community discussions" on wind energy and electrical transmission lines in Wyoming at Kemmerer High School.

The first discussion was held in Douglas in April and the second round was conducted in Wheatland last month.

Nearly all who spoke in Kemmerer expressed their dissatisfaction with the preferred "northern route" for the Gateway project. Residents said they favored locating the transmission lines within the existing corridor.

"From day one, it only made sense to me to use the existing corridor," said Dan Schwab, who owns a ranch on the Hams Fork.

Freudenthal, Lincoln County Commission Chairman Jerry Harmon and state energy officials took an overflight of the Commissary Ridge area Thursday afternoon prior to the community discussion.

The governor said the state also prefers the transmission line be sited within the existing corridor. "Seeing it from the air ... it's even more evident we need to stay within that existing corridor," Freudenthal said.

"So much of this country does not have the level of disturbance that the existing corridor does," he said. "For us, it's just logical to follow that existing corridor."

Read more about this story in Saturday's Star-Tribune.

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