

Tillamook transmission line opponents resist eminent domain

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Opponents of a proposed transmission line in Tillamook County want to prevent a power utility from obtaining the power to condemn farm and forest land.

During an evidentiary hearing on Nov. 1, project opponents tried to convince the Oregon Public Utility Commission against granting the power of eminent domain to the Tillamook Public Utility District, which would allow it to obtain property for the roughly 9-mile transmission line.

Many of the dairy farmers, timber operators and other owners of the 37 properties along the proposed line's path fear the project will be disruptive to agriculture and forestry.

For example, critics have cited negative impacts to cattle from "stray voltage" — essentially electricity leaking



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

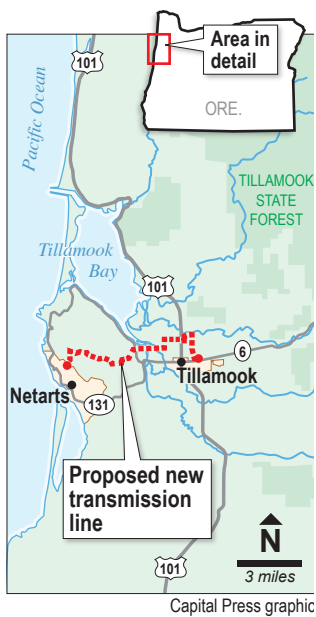
Members of the Oregon Public Utility Commission met on Nov. 1 in Tillamook, Ore., to hold an evidentiary hearing on whether to grant a local utility district the power of eminent domain, which it claims to need to obtain property for a proposed transmission line.

into the ground — and limitations on aerial pesticide spraying.

However, members of the Oregon Public Utility Commission mostly probed how the local utility district analyzed different options of improving power transmission

between Tillamook and the coastal community of Oceanside and whether the option they chose was justified.

Critics claim that reliability of power transmission to Oceanside could be improved by constructing an additional distribution line along



Capital Press graphic

existing roadside rights-of-way and that the anticipated growth in power demand doesn't justify the much larger transmission line.

Todd Simmons, the utility district's general manager, testified that he plans to first negotiate with affected land-

owners to voluntarily sell easements.

"Eminent domain is the last thing we'd enter into," he said.

Though the transmission line would cost \$13 million, compared to \$8 million for an added distribution line, it would solve more problems over the long term, such as adding electrical load capacity in anticipation of Oceanside's growth, Simmons said.

"We're at 96 percent capacity now, so we're essentially at our maximum," testified KC Fagan, the district's engineering manager. "The need for the project is here today, even if the growth rate were zero."

The growth rate of power demand in the area is a point of contention: The utility district now pegs it at 0.9 percent a year, while opponents believe an earlier estimate of 0.45 percent a year is more accurate.

With a new transformer that will soon be installed at one of the district's substations, the

current infrastructure would be able to accommodate 40 years of growth at a rate of 0.45 percent, said David Mast, an intervenor in the case and retired productivity manager from the Tillamook County Creamery Association.

Apart from the increase in power demand, the utility district also believes the transmission line will be less prone to outages.

"We just had an outage last week at Oceanside because a tree blew down," said Fagan, noting that a transmission line is more robust. "The poles and wires are higher up from the ground."

Opponents of the project were dealt a setback over the summer, when Tillamook County's board of commissioners approved a conditional use permit for the transmission line.

However, critics are now challenging that decision before Oregon's Land Use Board of Appeals.

Brewer withdraws from hop research funding

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Northwest hop farmers face a sharp reduction in research funding because a major brewer plans to withdraw from an industry-funded nonprofit next year.

MillerCoors, a large brewer based in Chicago, will cease funding the Hop Research Council, a nonprofit that funds breeding and other research, in 2019 and beyond due to "continued beer industry headwinds and the resulting budgetary constraints."

The company cited other problems with funding the council, such as an "inequitable" split of contributions across the beer industry and research benefits being available to non-members, according to a letter sent to HRC this summer.

"We are supportive of an initiative to review how public research and varietal development is funded by the hop industry so that all organizations that benefit are contributing equally," the letter said.

Capital Press was unable to reach a representative of MillerCoors as of press time.

In 2017, the company's contribution of roughly \$100,000 represented approximately 16 percent of the Hop Research Council's revenues.

Though the Hop Research



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Participants in a field tour examine hop plants from a new cultivar, which is expected to be publicly released after 18 years of breeding and trials by USDA and Northwest farmers. The withdrawal of a major brewer from an industry-funded research nonprofit has growers considering new funding options.

Council's finances remain stable due to cash reserves, MillerCoors' withdrawal from the organization means members must contemplate new revenue sources or cutbacks to research, said Michelle Palacios, administrator of the Oregon Hop Commission.

The grower-funded hop commissions in Oregon, Washington and Idaho are all members of the council, as are major national brewers, craft brewers and hop brokers.

The Hop Research Council's reliance on funding from major brewers "makes it very vulnerable to a member leav-

ing" and has lit a fire under discussions about long-term financial sustainability, Palacios said.

While the council isn't in danger of imploding, a significant decrease in funding would affect research projects that require many years to carry out, such as breeding new varieties or finding ways to control aphids and other pests, she said.

"The biggest risk is that we wouldn't be able to fund many research projects," Palacios said.

The HRC had hoped to assist with research in other hop-growing areas, such as Michigan and New York, but the withdrawal of MillerCoors will likely limit the ability to fund such projects, said Ann George, administrator of the Washington Hop Commission.

During an Oct. 18 meeting of the Oregon Hop Commission, members discussed the possibilities of improving the Hop Research Council's financial resiliency. Among the options being considered by the industry are a "penny per pound" fee on popular public hop cultivars, a tax on beer sales and enlisting associate members, such as input suppliers, who would contribute funds.

Fortunately, the growth in hop acreage in recent years has generated revenues that will partially help offset the lost funding from Miller Coors, said George.

"There are a lot of options out there that have yet to be vetted," she said.

Leaders weigh costs of water project

Project advocates ask Trump for financial support in budget

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

MOSES LAKE, Wash. — Money remains the biggest stumbling block for getting water from the Columbia River delivered to farms in the Odessa subarea to replace declining wells, leaders say.

Affordability to the farmer is the biggest issue, said Clark Kagele, an Odessa farmer and secretary of the Columbia Basin Development League, during the group's annual meeting Nov. 1 in Moses Lake, Wash.

Kagele estimated the cost of a pipeline to his farm would range from \$280 to \$346 per acre at different points, plus the cost of water. That's double what he's paying right now for deep-well irrigation, he said.

Kagele operates five wells, all of which have previously failed and had to be replaced. Three are deeper than 2,000 feet and two are at 1,400 feet. The last well he replaced cost roughly \$3,800 per acre, he said.

About 90,000 acres in the Odessa region are slated to receive water from the river. About 22,000 acres of crop circles would still be draw-

Nate Andreini, district engineer for the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District, shares "cool technical details," including a look at the engineering drawing of a canal siphon during the Columbia Basin Development League annual meeting Nov. 1 in Moses Lake, Wash.

ing from the Odessa aquifer even when the groundwater replacement program is complete, Kagele said, calling it "unsustainable."

Finishing the federal Columbia Basin Project needs to be the next step in getting as many farms off the aquifer as possible, he said. Congress originally authorized 1.03 million acres for irrigation from the river in 1943, but the project currently serves 694,000 acres.

The sense of urgency varies among farmers, said Jed Crowther, development coordinator for the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District.

"Some people can look today and think their well's still operational and they're not too uptight about planning for 10 or 20 years from now," Crowther said. "I have heard some landowners say they can't afford not to invest in the replacement program, and on the flip side, I've heard from

others that need to reduce the cost before they can participate."

"You might be surprised how much coordination it takes," said Nate Andreini, district engineer for the irrigation district. "We've got farmers out there and they're used to running their own business, turning their own wells on and off and getting together as a group to be served by a single system operated by the district, there's a lot of education and everyone comes at it from a different perspective."

"Every single city and town in Adams County has had declining well issues," said Stephen McFadden, economic development director for Adams County, citing challenges in Othello, Lind and Ritzville. "If those wells continue to decline for those municipalities, that means the potential ruin for a community."

McFadden said there are multiple viewpoints about how the project should be funded, but finishing it would benefit the entire region.

Andreini, the engineer, said an effort of the project's "massive" scope has never been tackled before. Bringing everybody together will take time, he said.

Earlier this year, an effort to revise the benefit-cost analysis for continuing the second half of the federal Columbia Basin Project opened the door for increased federal funding, which many leaders cited as a hopeful sign.

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