

District Settles On Route For Power Line Through Sandhills

COLUMBUS, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Public Power District has settled on a final route for a new high-voltage power line that will cross several counties in the state's environmentally sensitive Sandhills region.

The district announced the decision Monday, saying it sent letters last week to landowners along the route as part of the district's effort to obtain entry permission.

The transmission line will start at Gerald Gentleman power plant near Sutherland and go north to a new substation near Theford and then east toward Holt County to a new substation that will connect into an existing transmission line.

NPPD Vice President Tom Kent said the route has changed from what was announced in April and May last year. It now avoids a private airstrip, is farther from several homes and also doesn't cross some new wetland reserve program properties.

Some ranchers along the route have said the line poses a threat to the Sandhills' fragile ecosystem of grasses and dunes. One of them, Bob Price, said he hasn't reviewed the new route yet but still thinks the 345,000-volt transmission line shouldn't be built.

"The Sandhills should be protected and respected," Price told the *Lincoln Journal Star*. "The rangeland of the northern Great Plains is being challenged right and left, and we should preserve what is left."

Price, who belongs to the group Save the Sandhills, said

the group doesn't have a legal avenue to challenge the final route.

The district said it will use steel poles on sections that have relatively good access and it will use lattice towers that could be installed by helicopter on sections of the project that have limited access. The towers minimize the effect on fragile soil, the district said.

Line construction should start in February 2017, the district said, while the line is scheduled to be in service by September 2018.

The Southwest Power Pool, a regional electricity transmission group that includes the Nebraska district, is paying 93 percent of the \$361 million project cost, with the district paying the remainder.

Change

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the warm side for February," he said.

Looking at the bigger picture, Todey said climate change has affected agricultural practices, particularly with the timing of the year. In general, spring and fall are seeing more precipitation, he said.

"We are seeing more changes in the late season, when the corn and beans are still transpiring," he said.

Even with periods of wetter weather, the U.S. Drought Monitor currently rates most of eastern South Dakota as abnormally dry, Todey said.

South Dakota's dry condition pales to the drought plaguing California and the Southern Plains, Todey said. California has remained in drought even with a period of heavy rains, he added.

"The California drought has a few more years to go.

There isn't a chance for much recovery this year," he said. "They won't have drought issues forever, but they will have water issues."

Those water issues are affecting California farmers, Todey said.

"In California, the water goes to human consumption, and agriculture in California is going to make changes," he said.

Midwest farmers could step in and start growing crops that are no longer going to be grown in California and other Western states, Todey said. "Can you do something here that they can't do there?" he asked his Parker audience.

The nation's population shifts are also placing more pressure on water resources, Todey said.

"In the Southwest, you're seeing more people and less water, so do the math," he said. "States are suing over water rights. We're lucky that we have water to work with, but people in the West are looking at ways to get our water."

In general, Todey looks for warmer weather through spring in South Dakota. As far precipitation, the region has had more snow than it appears because the snowfall has melted quickly, and February and early March generally bring large snow events.

"As far as precipitation, there's some hint at wetter conditions. I wouldn't be surprised to see it, but we're not going to see it like last year," he said. "I don't expect a repeat of the record (crop) yields from last year when it was cool everywhere."

The Midwest can be grateful for its current balmy weather compared to the storms that rocked New England and the Middle Atlantic states, where some places received upwards of three feet of snow, Todey said.

"Be thankful you're not in Boston," he said.

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Code

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smoke detector."

Nickles said while it may not be a requirement for all buildings, he still highly recommends using carbon monoxide detectors.

"I recommend it for any building that has any type of gas appliance," he said.

Nickles added that the city usually sees a few incidents

each year in which the fire department is needed to handle possible carbon monoxide cases, with a couple usually involving medical treatment for carbon monoxide exposure.

Nickles said first the state will consider adopting the 2015 revision of the International Fire and Building Code. This could happen either during the current legislative session or in 2016. Upon the state's approval of the code, the city would then have the option to adopt the 2015 code. Currently, Yankton operates under the 2009 fire code.

The International Fire and Building Code is revised every three years.

Additional provision changes to the new fire code include the dropping of requirements for hotel guest rooms and common areas to include carbon monoxide detectors, however, hotel service rooms would still be required to have them.

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Insurance

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roll in a health insurance plan until the next open enrollment," Grassrope said. "So it is important to have as many events as we can to get as many people enrolled as we can and to help them as much as possible until Feb. 15."

ROCS is doing a free outreach event in Yankton on Thursday, Feb. 12, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Avera Office Pavilion room 3, located at 501 Summit Street.

"We do prefer, if they can, to call ahead of time to set up an appointment so we can guarantee a time for them," Grassrope said. "But we will be available all day to help people enroll and if they just want to walk in we will be there to help."

Baca noted there is a paper application available if someone would rather go that route.

"It is not that you have to go online to enroll, we just suggest online because it is quicker," Baca said. "However, they do need to be aware that on paper, there is really no way to do a plan comparison. There are three companies here in South Dakota selling products but there are 38 different options."

By calling the South Dakota hotline number consumers will be directed to a local center where you can get help enrolling.

"After the enrollment period ends, the only way someone can enroll is if they have had a life-changing event: A child was born, they moved out of state and need a new insurance plan, maybe they lost their job and therefore their insurance coverage," Baca said.

She added that, if someone is over 65 and on Medicare, or if they are under 65 on disability, they don't need to apply. The program is for anyone who is not covered otherwise.

She did add that there are more than 30 other exemptions. To get an exemption — an example would be you lost your job

or are a victim of domestic abuse — you need to go to healthcare.gov, call the 1-800 number or go through the Internal Revenue Service, Baca explained.

"Right now we are going after what we call the 'young invincibles,'" Baca said regarding people in their 20s and 30s who don't feel they need insurance.

"When you are younger you think you are invincible. You are going to skiing and never think you might crash and break your leg. It is better to be insured and not have to worry about what it is going to cost you after the fact."

The penalties for not enrolling are:

- For 2014 taxes the penalty is \$95 per adult, for a child it is half of that, \$47.50, with a maximum of \$285 per family or 1 percent of their annual gross income, whichever is greater.

- For 2015 taxes the penalty is \$325 per adult, \$162.50 per child, with a maximum of \$975 per family or 2 percent of their annual gross income, whichever is greater.

- For 2016 taxes the is \$695 per adult, \$347.50 per child, with a maximum of \$2,085 per family or 2.5 percent of their annual gross income, whichever is greater.

"It was going around that, 'It is only \$95, so I don't have to worry,'" Baca said. "But someone who makes \$100,000 would have to pay \$1,000 and they are not getting insurance for that \$1,000. Next year, it would go up to \$2,000 and in 2016 to \$2,500. It is a good chunk of money where you could be paying for insurance."

While she said South Dakota is doing very well — with only about 9 percent uninsured in the state — Baca said there is still a lot of room for people to go out and check out what is available.

"If you have private insurance that you got through your insurance agent, go out on the Marketplace and check you might be eligible for tax credits," she said. "There is no charge for looking. Also, if you go through an agent, as long as they put it through the healthplace.gov website, you will get those tax credits. If it is purchased totally

outside of the marketplace you will not get the credits. There are many agents that have taken the training that are certified to sell the products."

In South Dakota average premiums after tax credits are \$75 per month. Average premium before tax credits is \$374, based on a mid-level silver plan. A family of four with a gross income of less than \$95,400 will qualify for lower premiums, Baca said. A family of four with less than \$59,625 gross income will qualify for tax credits.

"I have seen people get tax credits where they pay no premium, it is income-based," she said. "People at up to 400 percent of the poverty level get some form of tax credit. The issue we are seeing a lot of is where the employee is able to get health insurance through their employer but the family coverage is so expensive, they cannot afford it. Because they are offered insurance, they do not qualify for tax credits; the only exemption is if the insurance he would be paying would be more than 9.5 percent of their gross income."

Baca said this year on the federal tax form, there will be a box that everyone has to check if they have insurance. She also warned that anyone who has received a tax credit will be receiving a 1095A form in the mail that will need to be filed with their taxes.

"They want to review it and make sure that it reflects the right amount of money that they made throughout the year so they are getting the right tax credits," she said. "This is the first year that anyone who has received tax credits to pay premiums in the last year will get this form and they need to be aware they are coming and need to be used when they file their taxes."

For more information on the ROCS event or to set up an appointment time, contact Alexa Raymond at 605-469-5711 or Grassrope at 605-469-5363.

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Disease

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cluding Ebola and Tuberculosis, which has been on the books for more than 50 years.

The Health Department said it limited the scope of the bill to alleviate fears of government overreach while still giving the state enough power to protect the public's health.

"True, if someone comes back to this country and has been exposed to Ebola, they may have their personal liberties restricted for a brief period of time until we know they're safe," said Rep. Karen Soli, a Sioux Falls Democrat. "For me, that's a small thing that for the safety of all of us, I don't have any problem at all with this taking place."

Rep. Lynn DiSanto, a Rapid City Republican, followed Soli with an often-cited quote from Benjamin Franklin about liberty and safety. DiSanto said the proposal would infringe upon the freedom of people to make their own decisions about their health.

"Do not let the scare of Ebola lead us into making a hasty decision that has a far-reaching impact," she said. "When the government decides to make mandatory any health concern, they remove the liberty and relationship between a patient and their health care provider."

Under the existing law, it's a misdemeanor for anyone who has Tuberculosis to refuse to accept the diagnosis or treatment of their illness or refuse to comply with Health Department orders. The proposed measure would also make it a misdemeanor for the other four diseases the department is proposing: Ebola, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Smallpox.

The bill passed out of the House on Tuesday would also create a process by which the department could work with the court system to obtain judicial orders for those who refuse comply.

The measure originally had an emergency clause, which means it would take when the governor signs it, but that was removed in an amendment Tuesday.

The bill will now move onto a Senate committee to be heard.

HOW THEY VOTED

Here's the tally for the state House of Representatives on HB 1058 that expands contagious-disease authority of South Dakota Health Department to respond to MERS, SARS, viral hemorrhagic fevers and smallpox in addition to existing authority regarding tuberculosis. The bill passed 41-27 and now heads to the Senate.

Yes (41) — David Anderson, R-Hudson. Julie Bartling, D-Gregory. Archie Beal, R-Sioux Falls. Shawn Bordeaux, D-Mission. Kristin Conzet, R-Rapid City. Justin Cronin, R-Gettysburg. Fred Deutsch, R-Florence. Dan Dryden, R-Rapid City. Mary Duvall, R-

Pierre. Dennis Feickert, D-Aberdeen. Peggy Gibson, D-Huron. Brian Gosch, R-Rapid City. Michele Harrison, R-Mobridge. Paula Hawks, D-Hartford. Spencer Hawley, D-Brookings. Leslie Heinemann, R-Flandreau. Steve Hickey, R-Sioux Falls. Thomas Holmes, R-Sioux Falls. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton. Timothy Johns, R-Lead. Kevin Killer, D-Pine Ridge. Alex Jensen, R-Sioux Falls.

Patrick Kirschman, D-Sioux Falls. Kris Langer, R-Dell Rapids. Steve McCleery, D-Sisseton. Mark Mickelson, R-Sioux Falls. Jeff Partridge, R-Rapid City. Kent Peterson, R-Salem. Ray Ring, D-Vermillion. Fred Romkema, R-Spearfish. Tim Rounds, R-Pierre. Tona Rozum, R-Mitchell. Kyle Schoenfish, R-Scotland.

Jacqueline Sly, R-Rapid City. Karen Soli, D-Sioux Falls. Roger Solum, R-Waterloo. Mike Stevens, R-Yankton. Dick Werner, R-Huron. Steve Westra, R-Sioux Falls. Dean Wink, R-Howes.

No (28) — Jim Bolin, R-Canton. Thomas Brunner, R-Nisland. Blaine Campbell, R-Rapid City. Scott Craig, R-Rapid City. Lynn DiSanto, R-Rapid City. Lana Greenfield, R-Doland. Don Haggard, R-Sioux Falls. Steven Haugaard, R-Sioux Falls. Roger Hunt, R-Brandon. Dan Kaiser, R-Aberdeen. Josh Klumb, R-Mount Vernon. Isaac Latterell, R-Tea. Sam Marty, R-Prairie City. Elizabeth May, R-Kyle.

Al Novstrup, R-Aberdeen. Herman Otten, R-Tea. Lee Qualin, R-Platte. Nancy Rasmussen, R-Hurley. Lance Russell, R-Hot Springs. Jim Schaefer, R-Kennebec. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Waterloo.

Jim Stalzer, R-Sioux Falls. Burt Tulson, R-Lake Norden. Mike Verchio, R-Hill City. John Wiik, R-Big Stone City. Matt Wollman, R-Madison. Larry Zikmund, R-Sioux Falls.

Excused (2) — Scott Munsterman, R-Brookings. Dean Schrempf, D-Lanry.

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