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Comments: APS Oak Creek TO McGuireville 69KV Transmission Line Project 2/19/2025 Meeting - A Resident's Perspective

On Tuesday 2/19/2025, residents of the VOC came to a very important meeting orchestrated by the Big Park Council, ostensibly to meet the APS and USFS representatives who are pushing the APS hybrid above/below ground high voltage power lines slated to be installed south of the VOC. Upon arrival at this meeting, we were advised that suddenly and at the last minute, absolutely NO ONE from either APS nor USFS would be attending this meeting.

The people that were slated to attend this meeting that participated in this boycott were:

Mike Dechter, Environmental Coordinator, Coconino National Forest

Alex Schleuter, District Ranger, Red Rock Ranger District

Sadly, this was not surprising. In the past few weeks, we have all seen the "sell job" articles in the Redrock news, wherein APS and USFS have been touting the wonderful benefits this new APS line will be for the residents of the VOC. The articles seemed to imply that this was a "done deal". Clearly, this is ONLY the perspective of both APS and USFS.

APS could NEVER have proposed and adopted this insane plan, without USFS approval and backing, as most of the proposed line is on USFS land. It is shocking that a decision like this was adopted for a community like Sedona, that is 100% surrounded by National Forest! It simply appears to local residents, that the USFS did not have what was best for this community in mind, when this decision was rendered. Was there some sort of collusion going on between APS and the USFS on this issue, entirely to our detriment?

Given this assumption, are we surprised then, that the USFS caved in to APS, to allow 65 foot steel above ground high voltage power lines to be placed in the USFS land along areas of BeaverHead Flat road, and 2.5 miles or so, along Kel Fox Trail? All of which will be visible to the VOC & hikers out enjoying the scenery, and putting the VOC at risk for fire from the prevailing southerly winds, where none previously existed? What a colossal disappointment the USFS has turned out to be for the residents of Sedona! Given the track record of forest service maintenance in the VOC, the USFS should NEVER have facilitated this plan with APS over the safety and beauty of this community!

Having owned property in Pine Valley for over 25 years, having witnessed the aftermath of La Barranca fire in 2006, and seeing the daily reminders of same, over the past 19 years, it certainly seems like the residents of VOC, are the LEAST important people on the planet to the USFS, let alone APS. While forest fire mitigation efforts have gone on elsewhere in the state, in 19 years, not ONE dead tree or bush that burned during that fire in USFS land, has been removed, nor has any action been taken to mitigate future fires in the area. See the photos of the current landscape as a result of the La Barranca fire along Jack's Canyon road, just outside the community of Pine Valley that I have included with this article. The Jack's Canyon tinderbox remains as it has, for 19 years. This is a sad state of affairs, indeed.

Beaverhead Flat road, is a beautiful 6 mile stretch of two lane country road, meandering through a scenic bucolic countryside. The area is devoid of trees, but full of rolling hills, and very dry brush. Every time I go to Cottonwood, I love the road, the countryside and the fresh air. Can you imagine this destroyed by sections of 65' steel high voltage power lines? This is also located directly SOUTH of the VOC, where prevailing winds would

blow any fires right to where we live!

It appears to me that APS & the USFS are looking at this backwards. The VOC is a natural work of art, which should be cherished, treasured and protected. Learning from the LA fires, it is crucial to look not at what it costs to install, but rather at the final cost IF we fail to do the right thing at the outset. In the event of a fire, the Village as we know it, will be no more. Given the average age of the residents in the VOC, and the track record of the USFS on mediating the ravages of a fire in the VOC, any fire here would never be rectified by the USFS in our lifetimes. We love this place, otherwise we would not live here. To many of us, living here is a dream come true, EARNED by years of work, energy and effort.

Our property insurances have already either risen dramatically or have been cancelled altogether, and this is BEFORE the LA fires in January. Insurance companies DON'T lose money. The ramifications of the LA fires, have yet to be felt here. It is surely coming.

Fire is our #1 fear for the residents of Sedona. If we have a fire, evacuation could come down to one way in and one way out, or no way out if the fire surrounds us. Did we buy or build our forever dream homes here in this gorgeous place, for this eventuality, orchestrated by EMPLOYEES of large companies and government entities that have NO SKIN in the game? What they are doing purportedly "for us", is an acceptable risk FOR THEM, but certainly not for us. If anything happens to us, they will hide behind the vast coffers of APS and the US government, and not ONE of these employees who are making these decisions FOR us, will ever be held accountable

APS started this project in 2019 and proposed above ground 65 foot tall electrical poles approximately 15 miles from the McGuireville substation ALL THE WAY to the substation at Jack's Canyon Road. Now, 4 years later, we are at a hybrid response. This is still the WRONG answer, but we are headed in the right direction. The USFS should continue to hold out for the RIGHT response. The RIGHT decision is the one that CANNOT contribute to fires or mar the landscape with UGLY monoliths.

The RIGHT decision involves remembering that Highway 179 is a federally designated Redrock Scenic Byway through the Village of Oak Creek.

1. Remove those wooden matchstick electrical poles currently on the south side of the VOC and currently crossing highway 179.
2. Replace them with underground power lines from the McGuireville substation to the Jack's Canyon substation.
3. Do not mar the scenic beauty of Beaverhead flat road, Kel Fox Trail and The Village of Oak Creek with ANY above ground high transmission lines.
4. Do not put any portion of the proposed route above ground that could contribute to an increased RISK of fire.
5. LEARN from the LA fires, and the aftermath which will go on for YEARS. LEARN!

Whatever plan is adopted, above or below ground, the costs shall simply be transferred to all APS customers, something to the tune of .003-.005% per customer. Cost should NEVER be prioritized over the safety or the beauty of this area. Tourists come here from all over the World. Tourism is our largest contribution to the economy of the state of Arizona. No one will come to a burned-out husk of a place, nor to sightsee in a place that has morphed into one covered with unsightly high voltage power lines. It's time for APS to consider the bigger picture, and not answer to the stockholders, but answer to the STATE OF ARIZONA, and what is RIGHT for the citizens and residents of SEDONA.

Why would APS and the USFS ever agree to ANYTHING that may put this spectacular place that WE CALL HOME at risk, or be morphed into such a deleterious eyesore to both residents and visitors alike, when there are clearly other options?

Please read up on the costs and safety of burying underground high voltage lines:  
<https://undergroundarizona.org/what-does-undergrounding-cost>

This is a truer perspective than the one presented by APS, who keeps insisting on utilization of above ground high voltage power lines, citing high costs of underground lines.

The Big Park Council discusses other options on their website, listed below, and even questions whether this entire project is even necessary.

<https://www.bigparkcouncil.org/local-issues/aps-transmission-line/>

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In the immortal words of Martin Van Buren, our 8th President of the United States:

"It is easier to do a job right, than to explain to someone why you didn't"

Just ask Governor Newsom about this one.