

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/4/2025 2:11:47 AM

First name: Patricia

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: TO: Responsible Official and Reviewing Officer, Regional Forester Michiko Martin

333 Broadway Blvd SE

Albuquerque, NM, 87102

RE: APS Oak Creek to McGuireville 69kV Transmission Line Project on the Coconino National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin and Those To Whom It May Concern:

I appreciate this opportunity to submit an objection regarding the above-referenced project based on information that was not available during the original comment period that ended Jan. 14, 2022.

According to the Forest Service website (<https://wildfirerisk.org/>) "Village of Oak Creek (Big Park) has a very high risk of wildfire - higher than 96% of communities in the US," as shown in an attachment (see attachment). This does not seem to have been considered in the Forest Service's acceptance of the APS proposal.

I have concerns about the proposed plan to install above-ground power lines as part of this project.

My primary concern is the safety of VOC residents and visitors, and the protection of our homes from the risks posed by wildfires. Our frequent drought conditions and high winds put us at similar risk experienced by people in the area surrounding Los Angeles, devastated in recent months with massive property loss as well as loss of life. Wildfires can result from various causes, but it seems irresponsible to invite additional risk by installing overhead power lines, which have been linked to wildfires, including the Camp Fire that devastated Paradise, CA in 2018 and the Eaton Fire in Jan 2025.

Should a similar situation happen here, our only means of escape is SR 179, a primarily 2-lane highway in either direction, which is often backed up under normal conditions. Our area has a significant number of residents over the age of 65 for whom such an evacuation would be particularly difficult.

To add potential insult to injury, HB2201 currently under consideration in the AZ state legislature would apparently keep utility companies such as APS from being held liable if their equipment or action causes a wild fire.

An additional concern is the impact on local tourism by introducing power lines that would disrupt the beauty of our surroundings that attracts millions of visitors, and which inspired my husband and me in our decision to move here when we retired in 2013. I anticipate a disruption to traffic on the affected section of AZ-179 during any implementation of this project. Underground lines, however, would require less maintenance, and thus less disruption, going forward.

Finally, our property values would be adversely affected, and homeowners insurance premiums likely to rise at an increased rate. Our own premiums had an average 4% increase annually from 2014-2000 and jumped to an average annual increase of 23% in the years since then. (see attachment)

Hundreds of VOC residents attended a recent public meeting hosted by the Big Park Council on February 17, 2025 to learn further details about this plan and to express our opposition to its impact on our community. We were disappointed that neither the Forest Service nor APS sent a representative to listen to our concerns. (meeting notice attached)

Last Saturday (March 1) I joined dozens of fellow residents in a peaceful protest along AZ-179 to inform others, including tourists passing through our community on that beautiful morning, of our concern. We were moved by the reaction of people who drove past in either direction, honking their horns and giving us a thumbs-up. I had the opportunity to personally share information with several people who were enjoying a visit from near and far to this very special place, after I drove down to the Ranger Station (which serves as an inspiring introduction to visitors) to turn around after the conclusion of our march. I have included a picture taken there as my final attachment.

I request that the power lines necessary for this project, particularly those in the section at the southern end of VOC and in the area surrounding Beaverhead Flat Road, be installed underground.

Thank you for your consideration.

Patricia Kopitke