

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/1/2020 4:20:28 PM

First name: John "Woody"

Last name: Woodruff

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Re: Proposed Holy Cross Energy Avon-to-Gilman 115-kV Transmission Line

Dear Supervisor Fitzwilliams,

I have been a home-owning resident of the Town of Minturn for more than 25 years. I was Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission for nearly 3 years through the approval of the preliminary PUD of the Bobby Ginn/Battle Mountain project. I have been an active member of the citizen's committee, meeting with Holy Cross Energy representatives over their proposed transmission line through the Eagle River Valley and the town of Minturn.

My comments on the proposal:

The line needs to be buried all the way through the valley. There are many reasons to put this entire line in the ground.

1.FIRE DANGER AND OTHER SAFETY ISSUES. Transmission lines have a proven history of starting wildfires. Most recently in California, where Pacific Gas and Electric is facing bankruptcy and multiple charges of manslaughter directly connected to fires started by above ground transmission lines. Minturn has been identified by the Eagle County Fire Marshal as a very high fire risk area. This is due to the fact that the town sits in such a narrow valley that if a fire ever did get started and got out of control, it would burn the entire town to the ground. Just 2 years ago a fire did start in the gun range and although the wind was blowing from the West and not down the valley into town, the danger caused Vail to evacuate their entire mountain of tourists and workers, which was downwind of the gun range. Thankfully the firefighting units responded quickly, and the fire was put out. If the wind was blowing harder that day, we would have potentially had a different outcome.

Another dangerous incident few years ago illustrates one more reason the line must be buried. A major section of Lionshead Rock, located in the cliffs that hang all along on the top of the ridge above the proposed route, broke loose and tumbled down to the river. The giant rocks that came down the hill, took out a fiber optic line, and a distribution line that run across the lower section of the hill. The giant rocks came to rest on the rail line and turning the tracks into spaghetti. It certainly would have brought down an above ground Transmission line. There are big boulders all along the ridge with the potential of breaking loose.

2.DIMINISH VISUAL QUALITY. If the Transmission lines are above ground, the visual impact to the town of Minturn and the Valley would be considerable. Historical value of one of the oldest towns in Eagle County would be impacted as well as property values.

The North end of the valley, adjacent to I-70 is considered the gateway to the town of Minturn, Tenth Mountain Division Highway, Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway and the WRNF/Holy Cross Wilderness Area. At this time there is not much development at this location, except for the current Forest Service offices. With the expected eventual sale of the Forest Service property and the development that will follow, this will become even higher profile as a gateway to the valley and the visual impact of high-tension poles and wires will become more intrusive. The section of the line from pole #28, where there are corner poles to support the long span across Hwy 24 and the Eagle River, should be buried to pole #39 where the currently the proposed underground section begins.

At the South end of the valley there is not much development at this time, but this is adjacent to where Battle Mountain has proposed to build 400 to 700 residential units. Poles 40-47 must be eliminated, and the line put underground. All of these poles (#29-39 and #40-47) that must be eliminated for fire safety and visual quality are on WRNF property and subject to your control. Because of the way Minturn is laid out along the valley floor there

are limited places for development and tall transmission poles will be an eyesore as the town grows.

3.HISTORICAL PRECEDENT AND THE ECONOMICS. Holy Cross Energy has dealt with this underground challenge before. The transmission lines that feed the town of Snowmass Village from the Basalt to Aspen Transmission line, in the Roaring Fork River valley, were buried by HCE. It is clear that burying power lines is more expensive than running them overhead. In this example from Pitkin County, the customers receiving the benefits of the transmission line, Snowmass Village, paid for it to be buried. The town of Minturn gets no direct benefits from this Transmission Line and the indirect benefits are more than covered by their cooperation to allow HCE to bring their lines across Minturn property. HCE will more than recover the additional costs of burying the line all the way through the Minturn Valley by the additional growth and customers they will be able to service efficiently by the addition of this transmission line.

4.PUBLIC INPUT. As I think back over public meetings that I have attended where HCE has presented this proposal, they have consistently faced strong vocal opposition; not only from Minturn residents, but from people living all over the county. Minturn holds a special place in the lives of Eagle County locals. It is a genuine small town with a real history that is not connected to Vail Resorts. People appreciate Minturn just the way it is; because it is real.

Unfortunately, because of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Forest Service has had to postpone verbal, face to face, input on this issue from residents until late summer at the earliest. The residents of Minturn do not tend to be very literate with the written word but are not shy about standing up and stating what they feel about an issue. Unfortunately, even though there has not been an open meeting to hear directly from the people involved in this issue, the Forest Service has stated that you will move forward on a draft of the Environmental Assessment; without complete scoping and hearing directly from "the people". The Forest Service has a long history of "open and transparent decision making" that truly represents their constituents; "we the people" that own the forest that the Forest Service protects. Everything else in our lives is being put on hold by this unprecedented difficult time and it is essential that the Forest Service postpone the entire EA until it can properly go through all the steps, including hearing from the people impacted, in person, before preparing a draft of Environmental Assessment. This is a very important work and the Forest Service doesn't want to leave itself open to being challenged because the process, through the Coronavirus outbreak, did not follow the letter and spirit of preparing an appropriate Environmental Assessment of this issue.

In closing I want to thank you and your team for all the work that you are doing to address this issue in the forest that we all love. I think I represent the majority of the Minturn residents, our neighbors, when I say that we don't oppose the line that will help all of us in Eagle County enjoy more reliable electrical service. We just don't want to see these dramatically tall poles marching through our valley.

We understand the usefulness of this addition line, but it needs to be buried.

Thank you for your commitment to our forest.

Sincerely,

Woody Woodruff