

# The Pueblo Chieftain

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## Hearing set on Black Hills power line through Pueblo West

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A decision on a proposed 115 kilovolt Black Hills Energy transmission line through Pueblo West will be discussed at a public hearing Thursday before the Pueblo County Commissioners Thursday.

Pueblo West citizens living along the Wild Horse Creek area who have been fighting the proposal said Tuesday that they don't want the power lines, which would literally be in their backyards.

"This is totally unnecessary to destroy such a beautiful piece of property," Melvin Manrose said standing with neighbors in the backyard of his home in the 220 block of East Parkridge Drive.

Black Hills applied for a House Bill 1041 application that would allow for the construction of the Canon West Reliability Project -- a 39-mile, single-circuit transmission line that would travel from the company's existing West Station Substation in Pueblo County into Fremont County.

Black Hills officials say the purpose of the new line would be to improve electric power distribution and accommodate future growth in Pueblo West, Penrose, Florence and Canon City.

Manrose and his neighbors complained Tuesday that Black Hills will point only to a general area for the project and that they want more specific details.

"This is like building a house and not telling the building department exactly what kind of house you are going to build and where you are going to put it," he said.

John Vigil, senior program manager of community relations at Black Hills, said the company has defined the route but has not completed the level of details -- such as the locations of each pole -- that the citizens are looking for.

"What we do know is that we are going to stay as close as we can to the center of that easement so that we can maximize the distance away from the houses," Vigil said.

Vigil said that he met with this group earlier this month and that they are opposed to the line in general.

"There are very few modifications that they would be willing to accept," Vigil said.

Manrose said Black Hills has multiple transmission corridors to Canon City and that this proposal would only boost Black Hills' infrastructure and benefit its shareholders.

"It's only because of corporate greed that they want to destroy and forever change this beautiful section of public land," he said.

Manrose said the project would be located in an area dedicated to the citizens of Pueblo West Metropolitan District to be used as a recreation easement.

"Would you like 90-foot mono-poles in your backyard? Those are 100 kilovolt electric lines that would sit there and buzz and hum. It also would distort your TV reception," Manrose said.

A similar proposal by Black Hills was denied by the county commissioners in November of 2018. The original request was filed in May of 2018 after being approved by the Public Utilities Commission.

"Black Hills rectified none of the commissioners' concerns from 2018. All they did was move the transmission line from one corridor to another," Manrose said.

Manrose and other members of the community worry about the environment, extreme fire danger and property values going down if the project moves forward.

"They will drive out wildlife that includes three threatened species -- the burrowing owl, spotted toad and red racer, or coach whip, as it is also known," Manrose said.

"Plus, this area is abundant with wildlife. We have coyotes, fox, bobcats, deer antelope, road runners, red-tailed fox and golden eagles that frequent this area ... Once Black Hills starts building they are going to drive it all out of here."

Community members said a fire could start with a spark before anyone could even see it, and with stiff wind, it could wipe out Pueblo West.

The group claims that Black Hills has picked the worst possible route for the project. Manrose said three other routes are better.

"Two of them already have transmission lines on them and another is along U.S. 50," he said.

Vigil countered by saying the proposed project would be either within or would follow existing utility corridors.

"We are trying to build it where it is supposed to go," Vigil said.

Manrose said he is hoping that the commissioners will use the same criteria from 2018 to deny this route through this area.

"We are not against Black Hills having a transmission line, but this is just not well thought out," Manrose said.

Lew Quigley, a former Pueblo city manager and Pueblo West Metro District president who also lives in the neighborhood of the proposed project, said neighbors moved there for the sights and outdoor recreations such as horse riding.

"People have selected to come here because of the nature of the area," Quigley said.

"So what gives Black Hills or anybody else the right to come into our neighborhood, of which we were here before they were, and tell us that they are going to do something? Some of us are going to die living up here."

Vigil said the project is important to all Black Hills customers.

"We hope the county commissioners are going to vote in favor of economic development, clean energy and reliability," Vigil said.

The hearing is scheduled at 9 a.m. Thursday at the Sangre De Cristo Art Center.

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