Estes to Flatiron Transmission Line Rebuild Project

Concerns of a Residential Community

Meadowdale Hills Property Owners Association, Inc.

WAPA Comment Meeting

November 29, 2011

# Introduction

Meadowdale Hills and Ravencrest Heights sit at the Gateway to the Estes Valley. Meadowdale Hills is a residential community of 166 property owners. Ravencrest includes property owners and a Bible School / Retreat Center. Together, this population represents a vital, thriving component of the Estes Valley. We are business owners, employers and students. This is where we live, work, shop and play.

Considering that we received notification from WAPA just 10 days before the public comment meeting, and 6 of those 10 days have either been weekends or Thanksgiving holidays, our community members have had very little opportunity to gain a good understanding of the project. Many of us know so little, we don’t even know what questions to ask. So the Board of Directors has taken upon itself to study these issues and present these concerns in a clear, concise manner, on behalf of our community members. The following discussion outlines the key concerns of our community.

# Public Health Concerns

There is a substantial body of research connecting residential exposure to high voltage power lines and higher rates of cancer. In 1990, the EPA prepared a report suggesting a causal link between the vicinity to power lines and higher rates of “leukemia, lymphoma, and cancer of the nervous system”. In 2001, the World Health Organization’s International agency for Research on Cancer assembled a panel of over twenty-five world-renowned researchers who unanimously concluded that power-frequency magnetic fields are Class 2B possible carcinogens. They observed a “consistent statistical association between childhood leukemia and power-frequency residential magnetic field(s)”. We understand that heated debate on the subject is currently ongoing and highly political.

The proposal by Western to route industrial-scale high voltage transmission lines and towers through populated residential neighborhoods is inappropriate and potentially detrimental to the health of the families who live here, especially when they already have a more direct and less populated route. We suggest Western adopts a policy of “Prudent Avoidance” and runs the line away from populated areas.

# Impact on Property Values

Clear-cutting trees through the heart of Meadowdale Hills and Ravencrest Heights, widening the easement area, and more than doubling the number of lines and the height of the towers next to and over residences will result in significant damage to our property values. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identifies high voltage transmission towers and lines as a hazard, and they list them along side other human hazards such as flood zones, avalanche zones, oil and gas wells, and lava zones. Furthermore, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) guidelines prohibit the approval of loans for mortgages or re-finances for homes located in the “Fall Zone” of high voltage transmission lines. If Western goes through with this proposal, it will essentially be the equivalent to government seizure of private property. We strongly urge Western to avoid the installation of any industrial scale power infrastructure through the Populated Route, and rather site it through the Direct Route.

# Impact on Estes Valley as a Landscape Economy

Western’s proposed route for the transmission line and towers affects more than just property owners in the right of way. Businesses throughout the Estes Valley rely on the rural character, the majestic views, and the overall natural beauty of the area to thrive.  The town of Estes Park has grown into a landscape economy, whereby it depends heavily on tourism from businesses such as hotels, bed and breakfasts, retreats, local shops, restaurants, guiding services, and rental properties. Likewise, the real estate industry is an important part of the overall economy in Estes Park, and maintaining the integrity of the view sheds and sense of openness is critical to its success. Any further industrialization of this valley will affect the livelihood of everyone who lives and works here. Millions of people visit Rocky Mountain National Park every year, and US Highway 36 serves as the gateway to Estes Valley with some of the most spectacular scenic views in the nation.   Western is proposing to install transmission lines and towers at the very location where visitors catch their first glimpses of the Continental Divide with massive steel towers and a web of transmission lines.

# Solution: The Direct Route

Western already has available a direct route through the sparsely populated Estes-Lyons Tap. The Estes-Lyons Tap is 15% shorter, and using it would save money while eliminating the need to devastate our land and property values. Both routes currently in the discussion (Estes-Lyons Tap and Estes-Pole Hill Tap) traverse through the Crocker Ranch property, and the Estes Lyons Tap is already clear-cut and in use through the North fork of the Crocker Ranch. The less direct, populated route runs through the South Fork of the Crocker Ranch Property in direct view from Highway 36 and the scenic turn-out, and it would involve establishing an entirely new section of Right of Way. The Direct Route already has a buried gas line easement, sits on relatively easier terrain, and would minimize the visual impact for visitors entering Estes Valley.

In the process of upgrading transmission lines, we have before us a unique opportunity. Now is the time to consider the removal of towers across Lake Estes and over populated residential areas.  Alternative solutions such as buried lines or surface conduits need to be considered in order to minimize the extent of the industrialization of the Estes Valley.  The decisions being made today will have an enormous impact on future generations in the area, and will directly affect their quality of life and the experience of visitors from around the world.