



Release Date: December 2, 2011

Livingstone Landscape Wins Reprieve from Transmission Lines

In a highly significant decision, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) yesterday refused permission to Altalink Management Ltd. to build a new transmission line in the pristine landscape of southwestern Alberta's Livingstone Range.

At an August AUC hearing, a number of individuals and groups including Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) and the Livingstone Landowners Group, voiced their strong opposition to the routing of the proposed 240 kV lines, arguing that Altalink and the Alberta Energy System Operator (AESO) had not received the required Needs Approval for their preferred route. AUC's *Decision 2011-468* agreed with the groups in all essential matters.

"Altalink and AESO had previously received permission from AUC to construct a transmission line from the Oldman Dam west to the Crowsnest Pass," says Nigel Douglas, AWA conservation specialist. "But the companies were then attempting to use this permission to construct lines along an entirely different route, northwest into the Livingstone hills."

AUC's *Decision 2011-468* agreed with the opponents that, having received a needs approval to construct transmission lines along an existing right-of-way (Goose Lake to Crowsnest) Altalink and AESO did not have a right to change the location of the lines and build them somewhere else (Goose Lake to Chapel Rock). "Because there are material differences in the transmission facilities currently proposed from those approved ... both in terms of their geographic location and electric system configuration, the Commission finds that the Goose Lake to Chapel Rock line is not the same as the Goose Lake to Crowsnest line."

Local residents and members of the Livingstone Landowners Group had declined to be directly involved when the original (Goose Lake to Crowsnest) transmission lines were proposed in 2009, believing that they would not be directly affected. AUC ruled that these residents would be unfairly penalized if the route was changed with no public input: "All potentially affected landowners were entitled to proper notice of the AESO's intention to seek approval for the need for the facility in this location," Decision 2011-468 ruled. "These landowners did not receive such notice and, as a result, were effectively deprived of their right to participate in the making of that decision."

Peter Sherrington, AWA member and former president, represented AWA at the August hearing in Pincher Creek. Peter commented at the time that the issue was as "close to a no-brainer" as he's seen. "The important thing about this ruling," says Sherrington "is that it has restored ordinary citizens' faith in the process of regulation."

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