# Transmission Lines

Alberta's landscape is fragmented by a rapidly expanding network of roads, transmission lines, pipelines, cutlines, seismic lines, and other linear disturbance. Transmission lines, serving the growing energy demands of Albertans, make up a large proportion of this network. Alberta has over 13,500 megawatts (MW) of electricity generation capacity, delivered by over 21,000 kilometres of transmission lines. According to Government of Alberta statistics, Alberta has seen 6,500 MW new generation capacity since 1998. In addition, future developments of over 16,100 MW of new power generation (renewable and non-renewable) have been proposed by industry.

**AWA Position**

Central to the advocacy work of AWA is the protection and preservation of intact, representative ecosystems across Alberta. AWA believes that to the extent possible, all new transmission lines must be constructed within existing corridors of disturbance. In all other cases, new transmission lines must be routed to avoid environmentally significant areas including regionally designated areas, protected areas, critical wildlife habitat, intact fragments of grasslands and parklands natural landscapes and AWA areas of concern, as depicted on our *Wild Alberta* map.

Habitat disturbance and fragmentation due to linear disturbance is known to be the largest contributing factor to the decline of species at risk in the province. AWA believes the public needs more evidence that decisions regarding proposed transmission lines are being made with public and ecological best interests in mind. As a large portion of transmission lines are constructed across provincial public lands, meaningful and transparent public consultation must take place in which all participants are provided accurate and accessible information.

A thorough Environmental Assessment must be completed by the Transmission Facility Owner (TFO) when planning transmission line routes, including a detailed assessment of potential impacts to the environmentally significant areas listed above. The Environmental Assessment should identify species of concern, along with all proposed mitigation measures for any construction and necessary maintenance activities associated with transmission line development. In addition, AWA appreciates the opportunity afforded by public consultation on these projects and believes that we should be treated as directly affected interveners where these projects impact our areas of interest, as outlined above.

Best management practices must be used to minimize surface disturbance during the construction, maintenance, and reclamation stages of all associated project infrastructure. All feasible options to minimize disturbance must be considered, such as burying cables rather than constructing above ground infrastructure to maintain scenic viewscapes and wildlife corridors. New above ground infrastructure also impacts wildlife and ecosystems by altering predator-prey relationships. Birds of prey nest in and around transmission lines, and use the transmission towers as perch sites. For species at risk such as the greater sage-grouse, additional perch sites have been known to impact their ability to avoid predators.

AWA supports the development of efficient, sustainable energy projects as an alternative to large-scale industrial electricity production, such as coal-fired power plants. Small scale use of solar and wind power at residential, industrial and commercial sites will decrease the energy demands exerted by Albertans, and will thus help to decrease some of the demand for expanding networks of transmission lines. AWA supports Alberta's micro-generation policy that allows individuals to generate their own environmentally-friendly electricity, and receive credit for any power they send back into the electricity grid.

**References**

Government of Alberta, www.energy.gov.ab.ca/Electricity/ [doi: February 9, 2012]
AltaLink newsletter, November 2010, http://www.altalink.ca/ [doi: February 10, 2012]