

Scarred Forever: No Turning Back Once Transmission Lines are Built
by Bill Neiman, President of Clear View Alliance

Wind energy is renewable, the Texas Hill Country is not.

It's the truth in this statement that has brought landowners, business people, civic leaders and concerned citizens throughout the western Hill Country together to form the Clear View Alliance (CVA).

We don't question the need to bring wind energy from West Texas to populated areas along the I-35 corridor and farther east. But once 150 miles of high-voltage transmission lines on 18-story lattice towers have been built through the heart of the Texas Hill Country, it will be too late. We won't be able to reclaim the 200 foot wide swath of land that will be clear cut for the project, or the vistas, or farm and ranch land that will be taken.

This is what will happen if the LCRA Transmission Services limits the selection of possible routes to what is proposed now. Members of CVA have been working to protect our natural resources, our tourist-attracting views and our land-based economy. We have studied the maps and have found that there are better, less destructive routes, available. We want the LCRA to consider these alternatives.

The key to conserving the Hill Country is placing these proposed transmission lines along existing rights-of-way to keep the line construction from slashing permanent scars in virgin landscapes. This request is completely in line with criteria set out by the Texas Public Utility Commission. The LCRA, on its website, claims to use these criteria as part of its routing process, saying that it attempts to run new transmission lines along existing rights-of-way when feasible and/or attempts to run new transmission lines along roadways, railroads, and other forms of existing rights-of-way.

But LCRA's actions ignore these criteria. Currently, the LCRA's study area is so narrow that it excludes an existing 138 kV transmission line right-of-way and the I-10 corridor. The study area must be expanded, so that the proposed transmission lines can be placed with minimal damage.

CVA has respectfully requested that LCRA expand the study area, but the request has been ignored. In fact, the communication lines that we've established have been cut-off, and we've been told by various insider sources that LCRA staff is no longer allowed to discuss this project with affected landowners. Furthermore, LCRA will not even meet with our organization's attorneys on our behalf to discuss this reasonable proposal.

They can ignore us. The law gives the utility the power of eminent domain, which allows it to bulldoze through the last vestiges of undeveloped Hill Country and over the property rights of rural landowners. Wrapping itself in a cloak of green, the utility is successfully side-stepping our objections by characterizing our arguments as "not in my backyard."

LCRA's dismissal is ignoring the Hill Country's value and CVA's main point: The Hill Country is every Texan's backyard, and we who live here have the responsibility to protect its natural resources and its beauty. We understand that wind energy must be transmitted, but we believe that the lines should be sited with extreme care and precision because there are no 'do-overs' for our water, our wildlife and our rapidly disappearing open spaces.

The clock is ticking. On October 28, LCRA will present its preferred route to the Public Utility Commission. At that time, the Hill Country's options all but disappear.

Get informed. Get involved, before it's too late. For more information, see www.clearviewalliance.org.

Bill Neiman is the president of Clear View Alliance, Inc. a non-profit formed to raise awareness and work to minimize unintended impacts from the construction of wind transmission lines. Neiman also is the founder of Native American Seed, a family farm in business for 21 years near Junction, has a mission to protect and restore the natural resources, wildlife habitat, farms and ranches of the Hill Country.