

OCC gives utility status to Plains

by Brianna Bailey

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OKLAHOMA CITY – The Oklahoma Corporation Commission has approved utility status for the \$3.5 billion Plains & Eastern wind power transmission line project that would move power from Oklahoma wind farms to the southeastern United States.

“Oklahoma will receive a multi-billion dollar economic benefit from the development of this electric transmission line,” Commissioner Bob Anthony said.

The three-member commission voted 2-0 on Friday to approve granting Plains & Eastern status as a transmission-only utility in the state. Commissioner Patrice Douglas was absent.

As a transmission-only utility, Plains & Eastern will be required to provide the commission with periodic updates on the project, but designation as an Oklahoma utility will not give the company the authority to condemn land for the construction of the transmission line.

The commission has left the issue of eminent domain up to the courts to decide when Plains & Eastern begins negotiation with landowners in the state.

“The matter is clearly in the hands of the district courts in the various counties,” said Andrew Tevington, general counsel for the commission.

Plains & Eastern has signed an agreement with two Oklahoma landowners groups that said it would offer landowners the option to participate in arbitration before going to court when negotiating easements for the project, said Mario Hurtado, lead developer of the Plains & Eastern Clean line project.

The recognition as a utility in the state will help move development of the Plains & Eastern line forward and lend credibility to the project with the public, Hurtado said.

“We think it’s an important part of the process and it’s important for people to know that you are going to be held responsible and accountable,” he said.

Houston-based transmission line company Clean Line Energy Partners is developing the Plains & Eastern project. The transmission line would link wind farms in the Texas Panhandle, northwestern Oklahoma and southwestern Kansas to the area around Memphis, Tenn., providing power to the Tennessee Valley Authority service area. Construction on the twin-high-voltage line is expected to begin in 2013 or 2014 and take about several years to complete.

The Arkansas Public Service Commission, which regulates utilities in that state, denied Clean Line’s application for utility status in January. Clean Line plans to bring the case before Arkansas regulators again.

Clean Line recently announced that Plains & Eastern had inked a memorandum of understanding with the Tennessee Valley Authority to fully explore the wind power transmission line project.