

December 9, 2017

From: Jim Carlton...Meadowdale Hills Fire Mitigation and MHPOA Board Member

To: Meadowdale Hills Home Owners and Property Owners

Subject: Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) failures in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Process with the resultant impact on Meadowdale Hills and the U.S. Highway 36 corridor between Estes Park and Meadowdale Hills

1. The purpose of this letter is to provide you, the 126 Meadowdale Hills home owners plus property owners, with facts concerning the impending installation of 230kV transmission lines via 115' steel monopoles through Meadowdale Hills after they have followed U.S. Highway 36. WAPA is expected to publish the Final EIS in January 2018. There will be no formal public input process; however, there will be a 30 day period between the publishing date and any further action by WAPA. There is no need to wait...please consider making your voice heard on this issue and contact information is provided at the end of this letter. An constant concern throughout this process has been the existential threat posed by wildfire to Meadowdale Hills. All homes and residents in our dry community constantly face a wildfire threat; however, residents that live on one-way-in and one-way-out roads must deal with heightened risks. The 115' steel monopoles paralleling Pole Hill Road, will be positioned perpendicular to prevailing winds and due to their height will be subject to a greater wind load than the current wood-pole H-frame structures. I have spoken with the Estes Park Fire Chief and expressed our concern about the increased potential for wildfire with the current WAPA proposal. At that meeting we analyzed how fast a wildfire starting on Pole Hill Road would overrun Meadowdale Hills...minutes. That was based upon westerly 20 mph winds and dry conditions...a common situation in Meadowdale Hills. The wildfire prevention goal is crystal clear...do not allow Meadowdale Hills to be consumed by wildfires caused by falling power poles as happened in Napa and Sonoma Counties, California in October 2017.
2. The August 28, 2014 Draft EIS states, "The Draft EIS informs the public and interested parties of potential environmental impacts associated with implementing each route alternative. This Draft EIS analyzes the environmental consequences of four possible route alternatives with three routing variations to rebuild and upgrade the existing 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, and a no action alternative, which would keep the existing lines in place and continue established maintenance activities. Copies of the Estes-Flatiron Transmission Line Rebuild Project Draft EIS are available on the Web site <http://ww2.wapa.gov/sites/western/transmission/infrastructure/Pages/Estes-Flatiron.aspx>." A significant omission in the Draft EIS was a total lack of analysis of wildfire potential caused by the WAPA proposals. Meadowdale Hills has no capacity to fight wildfires as all water and equipment must be trucked in after a wildfire has started. Meadowdale Hills is unique in this aspect because the other communities referenced in the Draft EIS have water available.
3. There are two currently active 115-kV transmission lines. The one going through Crocker Ranch, on the old Loveland to Estes Road, that was built in 1938. The other that goes through Meadowdale Hills was built in 1953. "The proposed project would remove both existing 115-Kv single-circuit transmission lines and wood structures between Flatiron Substation and the intersection of Mall Road and U.S. Highway 36 in Estes Park and replace them with: (1) one double circuit 115-kV transmission line on steel monopoles within a single ROW, (2) a new double-circuit 115-kV transmission line on steel monopoles within a single ROW with the western portion buried in concrete cable trenches for about 2.6 miles,

(3) rebuild of both lines as single-circuit transmission lines on wood-pole H-frame structures on separate ROWs, (4) the no action alternative, which would keep the existing lines in place and continue established maintenance activities.” Despite WAPA including an alternative that clearly describes burying transmission cables they elected not pursue this alternative that would provide an environment free of power poles and transmission lines along U.S. Highway 36 and through Meadowdale Hills.

4. On December 20, 2011, the Town Board of Trustees of the Town of Estes Park adopted Resolution Number 18-11 that states,”(5) Impacts of not under-grounding transmission lines which may leave above ground transmission lines and towers vulnerable to terrorist threats; may result in tower failure and potential wildfire issues to an area already dealing with the impact of bark beetle infestation; and potential environmental damage from lightening and arcing of transmission lines; “ The Town of Estes Park could see the wildfire potential of the WAPA proposals and they put their concerns in a formal resolution. Despite this Estes Park Resolution WAPA did not include wildfire potential in their draft EIS.
5. The Estes-to-Flatiron Draft EIS in the Summary Section (S 4-5) lists Key Issues in the proposed project. “Key Issues are issues that were used to drive the development of alternatives and compare the differences between alternatives analyzed in detail. Key issues identified during scoping that influenced the alternative development include: (a) Effects of new ROW acquisition from the proposed project on land uses, property owners, and Western’s customers. (b) Effects of the proposed project on scenic travel corridors (e.g., U.S. Highway 36), residential developments, such as Meadowdale Hills and Newell Lake View subdivisions, and on National Forest System lands. (c) Effects of new road construction in inaccessible areas with steep topography. (d) Effects of the proposed project on recreational uses and experiences in the vicinity of Estes Park and Pinewood Reservoir, and on National Forest System lands accessed by USFS Road 122 (Pole Hill Road). (e) Effects of the proposed project on protected areas, including county open space, lands protected by conservation easement, lands within the Stewardship Trust Program, and State Wildlife Areas. No protected areas have been identified on National Forest System lands. (f) Effects of ROW expansion or new ROW acquisition on existing infrastructure (e.g., Upper Thompson Sanitation Districts treatment plant) and other structures.” Despite WAPA stating that they would design projects that considered the effect on the scenic U.S. Highway 36 corridor and Meadowdale Hills...they plan to have 115’ steel monopoles paralleling U.S. Highway 36 and this will become abundantly obvious as U.S. Highway 36 approaches Pole Hill Road. The 115’ monopoles will continue up Pole Hill Road and residents and visitors to Ravencrest and Meadowdale Hills will have 115’ monopoles as visual obstructions and wildfire risks, forever. Additionally, the 115’ monopoles will be eyesores for everyone passing Meadowdale Hills and as they descend U.S. Highway 36 toward Estes Park. WAPA has plans to reroute their transmission lines away from Newell Lake View Subdivision and are acquiring a new ROW to allow this. WAPA has acquired a new ROW to have their 115’ steel monopoles parallel U.S. Highway 36. WAPA has proposed plans that run their 115’ steel monopoles right through Meadowdale Hills...it need not be this way. WAPA has alternatives that would eliminate this unfair burden and wildfire risk to Meadowdale Hills.
6. The Draft EIS further lists Other Issues for Detailed Analysis. “Other issues define proposed project effects that should be analyzed in detail in the EIS, but that have not driven alternative development. Other issues identified for detailed analysis include: (a) Effects of the proposed project on property values, as well as sources of revenue from tourism and outdoor recreation that Front Range communities and the regional economy rely upon. (b) Effects of the proposed project (ground disturbance for access, pole removal, and new structure installation) on cultural resources. (c) Effects of ROW clearing and road

construction, road reconstruction and ongoing maintenance on wetlands, soils, and water quality. (d) Effects of electric and magnetic fields from high-voltage power lines on human health. (e) Effects of the proposed project on wildlife; plant; fisheries; threatened, endangered and USFS sensitive species; management indicator species; and general species of wildlife, plant (vegetation) and fish species.” The Draft EIS states that WAPA is aware of the detrimental impact on Meadowdale Hills property values...but, they are going to put their 115’ steel monopoles here anyway. The Draft EIS states that they are aware of the potential health risks of electric and magnetic fields on the residents of Meadowdale Hills...but, they are going to put their 115’ monopoles and 230kV electrical lines here anyway.

7. The decision published on December 5, 2016 with the identification of the WAPA Preferred Alternative for the Estes-Flatiron Rebuild accommodated by not running 115’ steel monopoles through their areas: (a) Thompson Valley Sanitation District (b) the 24 homes on the Joel Estes Drive in Estes Park (c) Newell Lake View Subdivision which required the acquisition of new ROW to redirect the power lines south of the Pinewood Reservoir. Significant is the fact that all these areas have access to water to fight a wildfire. The area that was listed in the Draft EIS Key Issues that was not accommodated in any manner was Meadowdale Hills. Meadowdale Hills, a residential community with 126 homes, is a dry community and has no water source to fight any fires. Any and all wildfires require the fire fighting equipment and water to be trucked into Meadowdale Hills. The December 5, 2016 news release stated, “Western region (closer to Estes Park): A modified version of Alternative C was selected because this route utilizes existing ROW (Pole Hill Road...my insert), while minimizing visual impact to the project area. It also avoids difficult terrain associated with other alternatives. The modification of this alternative will not reconstruct West Pole Hill Road to minimize impact to off-highway enthusiasts and recreational Activity.” As was pointed out previously, there will be a huge negative visual impact on the U.S. Highway 36 corridor and a extremely detrimental visual impact upon the residents of Meadowdale Hills. WAPA accommodates every other area in this project...except Meadowdale Hills. Final thought on Alternative C...Variant C1 (Summary page S-7)...”the westernmost 2.7 miles of the transmission line would be constructed underground.” Yet another opportunity for WAPA to eliminate 115’ steel monopoles from U.S. Highway 36 and Meadowdale Hills completely disregarded.
8. WAPA has an alternative that would accommodate the Thompson Valley Sanitation District, the 24 homes on Joel Estes Drive, the Newell Lake View Subdivision, and also remove the transmission lines from Meadowdale Hills and U.S. Highway 36. This solution for all involved is Alternative A Variant 2. “Alternative A - Rebuild and consolidate the transmission lines primarily on the existing North transmission line ROW. This alternative includes a reroute of the north and northeast of Newell Lake View subdivision and along Mall Road in Estes Park. Variant 1 - Variant 1 is identical to Alternative A for all but the westernmost segment. At a point in the valley between Mount Olympus and Mount Pisgah, this routing variation would depart from the alignment of the existing North Line and traverse along the base of Mount Pisgah before turning to the northwest and generally following an alignment parallel to U.S. Highway 36 for the remaining distance to the existing steel lattice double-circuit structure at the intersection of U.S. Highway 36 and Mall Road. Variant 2 - Variant A2 follows an alignment similar to Variant A1; however, the westernmost 2.7 miles of the transmission line would be constructed underground.” A deviation from Alternative A Variant 2 that would allow the monopoles and transmission lines to avoid the Newell Lake View Subdivision by moving the transmission line south of Pinewood Reservoir, as is currently proposed by WAPA, is as reasonable as putting transmission lines underground to avoid

U.S. Highway 36 and Meadowdale Hills. If WAPA can work to accommodate the Thompson Valley Sanitation District, the 24 homes on Joel Estes Drive, and the Newell Lake View Subdivision...WAPA can for little money, in the long run, accommodate U.S. Highway 36 and Meadowdale Hills.

9. In email communication with WAPA representative Mark Wieringa, he stated the following, "As I mentioned, we did consider formulating an alternative that would return to the North Route after getting west of the Notch and off the steep side of Mount Olympus. However, that option would result in a more or less perpendicular crossing of the valley fairly close to Estes, with highly detrimental visual impacts in a sensitive area. It would also require departing from the South Route from a point where the line is already high on the ridge, creating another situation where a portion of the line would have to be constructed on steep and rocky slopes. For these reasons, and the fact that impact to residents would merely shift from one group to another, this alternative was not developed." What Mr. Wieringa is describing is Alternative A Variant 1. If Mr. Wieringa had taken this one step further he would have Alternative A Variant 2...putting the transmission lines along his described route underground. Cost...last known estimates were \$1.1 million per mile in Rocky Mountain granite. Considering WAPA is acquiring new ROW to parallel U.S. Highway 36, and new ROW to avoid the Newell Lake View Subdivision; putting the transmission line underground to permanently avoid the U.S. Highway 36 corridor and Meadowdale Hills is completely reasonable.
10. So...what does all this really mean to Meadowdale Hills. WAPA knows that we are here; however, their concern level seems low for all the reasons previously stated. Solution: \$1.1 million per mile to bury the transmission cable sounds expensive, but the transmission lines through Crocker Ranch have been there since 1938...almost 80 years. Assuming the transmission lines buried, and undisturbed, would last 80 years the cost boils down to \$37.67 per day per mile. To a big organization like WAPA that little number is a rounding error. Getting it right should be the real quest of WAPA. They do care about Crocker Ranch, residents of Joel Estes Drive, Newell Lake View Subdivision, and the Thompson Sanitation District. WAPA does not seem to care about the eyesore they will create where the 115' monopoles approach Pole Hill Road from Highway U.S. 36. WAPA does not care about the wildfire potential even after the Town of Estes Park Resolution. If we quietly sit and do nothing we will certainly have 115' steel monopoles going through our community for the rest of our natural lives...and the wildfire risk that comes with them. WAPA identified a route that would completely avoid Meadowdale Hills and U.S. Highway 36...Alternative A Variant 2. That proposal eliminates all transmission lines along Highway U.S. 36 and through Meadowdale Hills. It also enhances the off-road experience for visitors to the National Forest. If WAPA contends that the underground transmission lines would interfere with National Forest Pole Hill Road and off-road enthusiasts; the solution is to bring the transmission lines out of the ground prior to crossing National Forest Pole Hill Road.
11. Contact Senator Gardner, Senator Bennett, and Congressman Polis. All three of their offices are aware of the WAPA U.S. Highway 36/Meadowdale Hills situation and we need to encourage them to engage with WAPA for all the right reasons.
12. Contact data:

Senator Michael Bennet

[www.bennet.senate.gov/?p=contact](http://www.bennet.senate.gov/?p=contact)

1200 South College Avenue, Suite 211, Fort Collins, CO 80524 (970) 224-2200

261 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510 (202) 224-5852

Senator Cory Gardner

[www.gardner.senate.gov/contact-cory/email-cory](http://www.gardner.senate.gov/contact-cory/email-cory)

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354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510

Representative Jared Polis

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