



# North state residents worry about TANC's effects on property values, lives

By Dylan Darling  
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It's been just over a month since Donna Caldwell discovered that her Cottonwood home could be in the path of new high-voltage power lines strung from Lassen County to the San Francisco Bay area.

She learned, like many others in the north state, by looking at an online map and scanning for the familiar figure of her home.

"My entire house, my entire property was covered in a big swath," she said.

She and a growing number of north state residents are trying to stop the Transmission Agency of Northern California (TANC) proposal to erect 600 miles of power lines through Northern California. Their initial concerns about power lines crossing their property and TANC's eminent domain powers soon mushroomed into worries about environmental damage, health effects and fallout from the massive project.

Hundreds have packed public meetings about TANC. Thousands have visited [www.stoptanc.com](http://www.stoptanc.com), a Web site established by residents in and near Round Mountain. Hand-painted anti-TANC signs have popped up in the communities that may be bisected by the lines.

Caldwell says it's just the beginning.

She's started a non-profit group called the North State Land Owners Committee and is bracing for a long fight.

Those opposed to the project have been flooding lawmakers with letters and are in the early stages of planning lawsuits if TANC doesn't change its plans.

"If we lose, it's not going to be for lack of effort," Caldwell said.

Patrick Mealoy, operations manager for TANC in Sacramento, said the agency has held 12 scoping meetings to gather public comments about the project's environmental documents.

It's also twice extended the comment period, with it now ending at the end of the month.

He said the agency will take the public comments - including concerns like those raised by Caldwell and others - into consideration as they rework the proposed project that likely wouldn't be built until 2014.

"Those are all issues and concerns that any project or any project like it will need to address," he said.

## Property value plunge

At 1,450 square feet with three bedrooms, her home isn't anything fancy, Caldwell said. But it belongs to her and her husband. Both 56, they've lived there for more than 30 years, raised their three children and run their

two horses on its 5 acres.

It's where the couple - she's a bookkeeper and he's a dump truck driver - plan to retire.

Now she wonders whether TANC will try to use eminent domain to put power lines over the property, how much they might pay for the place and how much it might sell for if they put it on the market themselves.

Just the potential of the power lines has likely dropped the value of the property, Caldwell said.

"Really, it's not even saleable," she said. "They are robbing us of everything we've worked hard for."

Although the TANC lines wouldn't cross over the property where Gerald Nelson lives in Round Mountain, they could slice through a nearby 8-acre plot he bought as an investment.

"That was my retirement," Nelson said.

The lines also would bisect Gary Hale's 1,000-acre Round Mountain ranch. Five such major lines already cross the property and he said he doesn't want any more.

Hale said the power lines restrict use of the land below them, bring unwanted visits from line inspectors and destroy any hope of parceling out the land for sale.

The hillsides around Round Mountain are crosscut with big, gray metal towers holding high voltage power lines.

Stan Sours, Hale's neighbor, said three lines already cross part of his 22 acres. The TANC lines are set to go right over his goat pasture, causing power lines to encircle his home.

"There just comes a point that enough is enough," Sours said.

### **Slides and pesticides**

Along with the concerns about declining property value, many of those opposed to the TANC lines are concerned about the environmental effects of clearing forests to make way for the project. And, around Round Mountain, they worry about putting towers on what many say is notoriously loose soil.

"This land is just not solid," said Alta Compton, who has lived there since 1953.

A landslide in the 1970s wiped out a market and other buildings owned by Compton's family.

She blames the landslide, in part, on power lines that ran across the hill behind the property. The path cleared for the power line primed the hillside for erosion and a heavy rain brought part of it down, Compton said.

Other environmental concerns include the effect of herbicides used to keep down the brush under the lines on watersheds and permanent deforestation of the power lines' path.

"Forests and power lines do not mix," said Ed Marek of Oak Run, who said TANC's lines are set to run across part of his 31 acres.

### **Unhealthy hum?**

Judy Sours, Stan Sours' wife, has long lived near power lines, first in Oak Run and now in Round Mountain. They've been an unwelcome sight that she struggles to ignore when trying to enjoy the mountain view from her porch.

Ironically, surrounded as they are by power lines, the Sourses live completely off the power grid, relying on solar power to meet their energy needs.

But if the towers and lines are out of sight, they usually aren't out of earshot. And that omnipresent hum causes Judy Sours to wonder about the health effects of the power lines on those who live close to them. The lines simply drip power like a leaky pipe, she said.

"You can walk under these lines with a (fluorescent) light bulb and it will light up," Judy Sours said.

While there have been no conclusive studies on the health effects of power lines, exposure to the energy they exude could be linked to cancer, she said.

### **Industrial versus rural**

Those opposed to the TANC lines often say they live where they do - in the hills away from cities - because they wanted a rural lifestyle.

Like the Sourses, some produce their own power.

"We've taken responsibility for our own energy," said Stan Sours.

But it's the power needs of faraway cities that result in the power lines crossing small communities such as Round Mountain, Oak Run and Cottonwood. Critics say they change the quality of the communities they pass through.

Once known for thick forests, Round Mountain is now marred by views of five major power lines crossing over the small town, said Lynn Dorroh, CEO of the Hill Country Health and Wellness Center in Round Mountain.

"Add two more lines and a substation and we'll look like an industrial wasteland, rather than a healthy, thriving community," she said.

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