



Editorial

Protect our monument: Reject power line proposal

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Barely had the Rio Grande del Norte been designated a National Monument when Tri-State Generation and Transmission announced a plan to run a high-capacity transmission line through a corridor that could include part of the newly designated area. While we appreciate the importance of investing in infrastructure and making the electrical system more reliable, we can't begin allowing such potentially disruptive development in the Rio Grande del Norte — especially when the Monument has just been established.

Tri-State, based in Denver, supplies electricity to Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, among others. Its proposed "Valley Corridor Project" would bring a 230-kilovolt line from Alamosa, Colo., to Northern New Mexico.

Tri-State hasn't yet determined a particular route for the line, and conservationists who worked for years (and some for decades) to see National Monument brought to fruition are staunchly against allowing the line into Taos County.

Though electric lines don't seem particularly destructive when compared to, say, mineral or oil and gas development, disturbances created by the construction, including the roads necessary to bring in heavy machinery, and maintenance of the lines are not to be discounted. Recent wildfires — including the Thompson Ridge and Tres Lagunas fires — are stark reminders that even once in place, electrical lines can have destructive effects on the landscape.

Not to mention the aesthetics: Imagine hiking through the roadless plateau, possibly encountering elk or eagle, contemplating the thousands-of-years-old petroglyphs you just saw, and thinking yourself connected to the Rio Grande's ancient volcanic and storied human history — only to be confronted with humming modernity in the form of straight, stark poles and strung wires towering over you and your surroundings. It certainly would detract from the experience.

This is exactly the kind of activity the monument designation is intended to block.

A Tri-State spokesperson said the company doesn't think "conservation and infrastructure development are mutually exclusive," but we think that in this case, they most certainly are. And we are grateful that those who fought long and hard to see the 240,000-acre Rio Grande del Norte receive permanent protection feel the same way.

Enduring preservation requires constant vigilance, and this line could be the first test of that resolve. Taos County is lucky to have dedicated residents and supporters who are up to the task.