



Windrise Wind Energy Inc.

Transmission Line 497L and Interconnection

November 16, 2020

Alberta Utilities Commission

Decision 25074-D02-2020

Windrise Wind Energy Inc.

Transmission Line 497L and Interconnection

Proceeding 25074

Applications 25074-A002 and 25074-A004

November 16, 2020

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1 Decision summary

1. Proceeding 25074 consists of four separate electric transmission development applications constituting the Windrise Connection Project:

- Application 25074-A001 by the Alberta Electric System Operator for approval of the needs identification document for the Windrise Connection Project.
- Application 25074-A002 by Windrise Wind Energy Inc. for approval to construct and operate a 138-kilovolt transmission line, designated as Transmission Line 497L, from Windrise 1063S Substation to Windy Flats 138S Substation.
- Application 25074-A003 by AltaLink Management Ltd. for approval to alter Windy Flats 138S Substation.
- Application 25074-A004 by Windrise Wind Energy Inc. for approval to connect Transmission Line 497L to Windy Flats 138S Substation.

2. The Alberta Utilities Commission considered the applications in a single proceeding, as contemplated in Section 15.4 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act*, at the request of the applicants. The Commission approved Application 25074-A001 filed by the Alberta Electric System Operator for approval of the need to connect the Windrise Wind Power Project to the Alberta Interconnected Electric System, and Application 25074-A003 from AltaLink Management Ltd. for approval to alter the Windy Flats 138S Substation in Decision 25074-D01-2020.¹

3. In this decision, the Commission considers whether to approve Application 25074-A002 by Windrise Wind Energy Inc. to construct and operate a 138-kilovolt transmission line from Windrise 1063S Substation to Windy Flats 138S Substation and Application 25074-A004 to connect the line to AltaLink Management Ltd.'s Windy Flats 138S Substation (collectively, the proposed project).

4. After considering of the record of the proceeding, and for the reasons outlined in this decision, the Commission finds that approval of Transmission Line 497L along Alternate Route A and the connection of the line to the Alberta Interconnected Electric System are in the public interest, having regard to the social, economic, and other effects of the applications, including their effect on the environment.

¹ Decision 25074-D01-2020: Alberta Electric System Operator and AltaLink Management Ltd. – Windrise Connection Project and Windy Flats 138S Substation Alteration, Proceeding 25074, Applications 25074-A001 and 25074-A003, September 23, 2020.

2 Introduction

5. The AUC approved the Windrise Wind Power Project in Decision 24699-D01-2019.² That project consists of a 206.4-megawatt (MW) wind power plant, collector lines and the Windrise 1063S Substation, all owned and operated by Windrise Wind Energy Inc. (Windrise). Windrise is the general partner of Windrise Wind LP, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of TransAlta Corporation.

6. The Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) received a system access service request from Windrise to connect its Windrise Wind Power Project to the Alberta Interconnected Electric System. The AESO, in consultation with Windrise and AltaLink Management Ltd. (AltaLink), examined eight transmission development options to respond to Windrise's request for system access service. The AESO determined that the preferred option to address the request involved upgrading AltaLink's existing Windy Flats 138S Substation to accommodate the addition of a new 138-kilovolt (kV) transmission line to connect Windrise's approved Windrise 1063S Substation to Windy Flats 138S Substation.

7. Windrise applied to the Commission for approval to construct and operate a 138-kV transmission line designated as Transmission Line 497L from the Windrise 1080S Substation to AltaLink's Windy Flats 138S Substation approximately 10 kilometres southwest of the town of Fort Macleod in the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26. Windrise also applied for approval to connect the transmission line to the Alberta Interconnected Electric System. The applications were registered as applications 25074-A002 and 25074-A004 on November 29, 2019.

8. Windrise's application to construct and operate the transmission line was filed pursuant to Section 24.31 of the *Transmission Regulation*. Windrise proposed to jointly operate the transmission line with the incumbent transmission facility owner for the service area, AltaLink, on a temporary basis. Windrise submitted that a subsequent application will be made to transfer the licence for the transmission line to AltaLink, following which AltaLink would become the sole owner and operator of the transmission line. The proposed project would not result in any additional costs to Alberta ratepayers.

9. Windrise stated that the proposed routes would utilize a combination of developed and undeveloped road allowances with structures located approximately one metre inside the public road allowance. Further, it would pursue the acquisition of a five-metre easement on private property where necessary for construction activities and future maintenance. The transmission line structures would be primarily single wood or steel poles approximately 30 metres tall supporting three conductors and a lightning protection wire. The distance between poles would vary from 80 to 150 metres for the length of the transmission line, which is approximately 20 kilometres.

10. Windrise submitted a preferred route and two alternate route options for the transmission line as shown in Figure 1 below. The preferred route is also identified by Windrise as route B

² Decision 24699-D01-2019: Windrise Wind Energy Inc., on behalf of its general partner, Windrise Wind L.P. – Windrise Wind Power Project, Proceeding 24699, Applications 25074-A001 and 25074-A003, October 18, 2019.

and is referred to in this decision as Preferred Route B. The alternate routes are referred to in this decision as Alternate Route A and Alternate Route C and are depicted below.

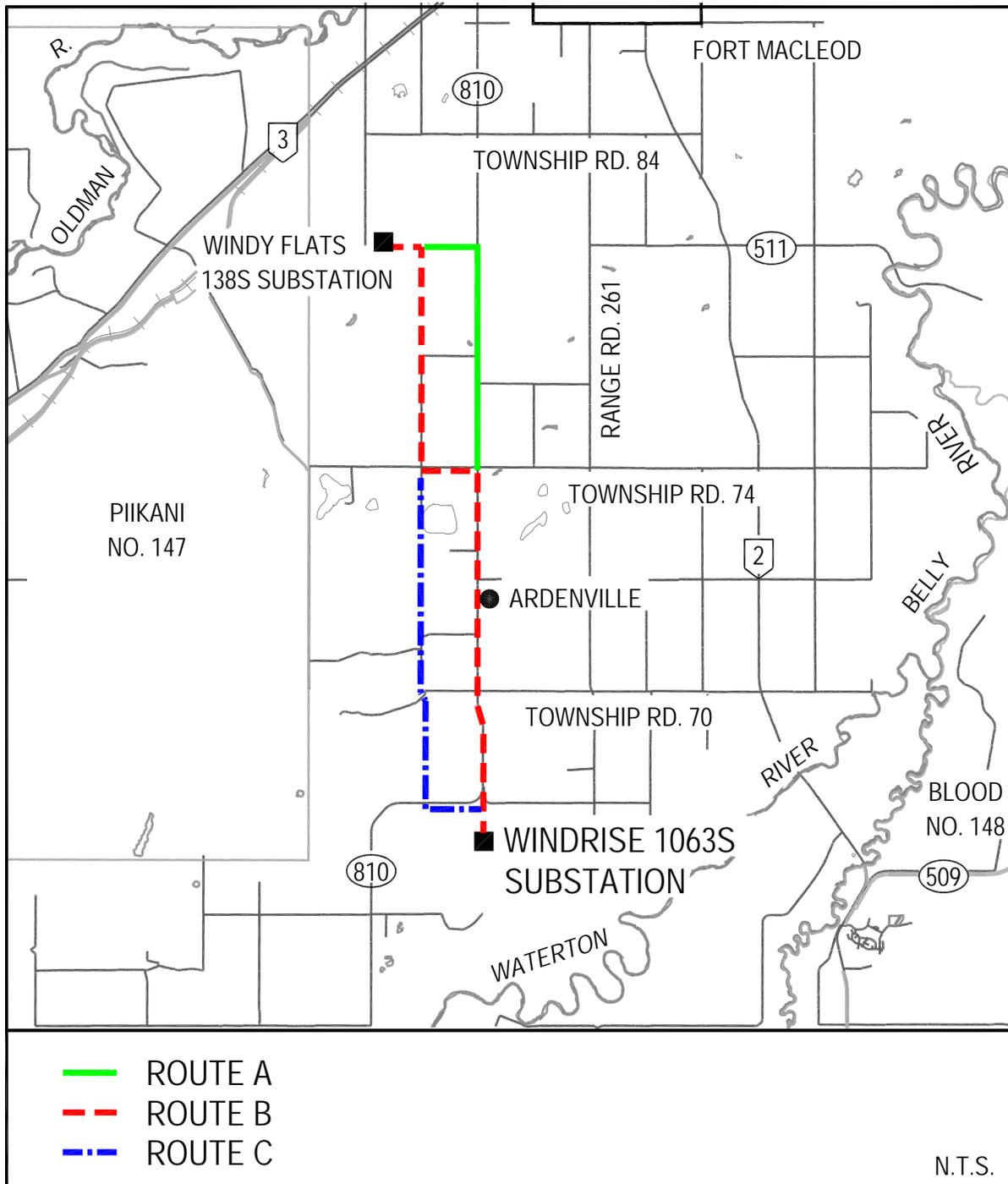


Figure 1: Proposed transmission line routes³

³ Certain segments of Preferred Route B are shared with other routes. Specifically, a segment of Preferred Route B south of Township Road 74 is shared with Alternate Route A, and a segment of Preferred Route B north of Township Road 74 is shared with Alternate Route C. In this depiction, Preferred Route B has been superimposed on top where route segments follow a shared path.

11. Windrise stated that it developed and conducted a participant involvement program (PIP) to meet the requirements of Rule 007: *Applications for Power Plants, Substations, Transmission Lines, Industrial System Designations and Hydro Developments*. Windrise notified landowners, agencies and other potentially interested parties within 800 metres of the proposed project. The PIP included multiple rounds of consultation and notification, and an open house that was held in September of 2019. Windrise indicated that it organized meetings with certain landowners who wished to discuss the proposed project in more detail and that stakeholders' comments and concerns were documented and considered during the PIP. Windrise indicated that it would continue to contact stakeholders, including notifying stakeholders directly affected by the approved route, of the construction schedule and other details prior to construction.

3 Process

12. On December 18, 2019, the Commission issued a notice of applications in accordance with Section 7 of Rule 001: *Rules of Practice*, confirming that the applications would be heard in a single proceeding. The Commission received five statements of intent to participate (SIPs) from landowners who own land in proximity to the proposed project, and a SIP from the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26. The Commission subsequently identified an error in the map appended to its notice of applications, and issued a revised notice of applications on May 27, 2020. In response to the revised notice, the Commission received two additional SIPs from landowners who own land in proximity to the proposed project.

13. The Commission granted standing to each of the following individual interveners who filed a SIP:

- Bob DeCecco
- Wendy and John McKinnon
- John and Linda Vallieres
- Robert Rippin and Niesje Vanden Dool
- Tim Donahue
- Wade and Denise Chester
- David and Bobbi Cook

14. Each of the interveners is a landowner living in proximity to at least one of the proposed routes. The following interveners co-ordinated their participation in the proceeding by forming the below groups:

- The Vallieres/Chester Group (VCG) consisting of John and Linda Vallieres, and Wade and Denise Chester, and joined by Jaycee Chester.
- The Route A Support Group (RASG) consisting of Robert Rippin, Niesje Vanden Dool, and David and Bobbi Cook.

15. The Commission denied standing to the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26, but allowed it to file a submission outlining the matters that it wanted the Commission to consider.

16. An oral hearing for the proceeding, initially scheduled to commence on May 12, 2020, was deferred in accordance with Bulletin 2020-06: *AUC defers live proceedings to reduce COVID-19 risk*.⁴

17. On April 29, 2020, the Commission issued a ruling explaining that Proceeding 25074 would proceed by way of a written hearing and sought submissions regarding future process steps to ensure that parties were able to participate meaningfully through a written process and to express their views. The Commission issued a written process schedule for the remainder of the proceeding on July 2, 2020.

18. Decision 25074-D01-2020 was issued on September 23, 2020, approving Application 25074-A001 by the AESO for approval of the need to connect the Windrise Wind Power Project to the Alberta Interconnected Electric System, and Application 25074-A003 from AltaLink Management Ltd. for approval to alter the Windy Flats 138S Substation.

19. There is no consensus among the interveners as to which, if any, of the proposed transmission line routes is in the public interest. Notwithstanding their differing views on the various route options, all of the interveners have raised certain concerns that are relevant to the proposed project as a whole and relate, in varying degrees, to all three of the proposed routes. For the purpose of this decision, the Commission will first address the methodology used by Windrise to select the three transmission line route options it proposed in its application. The Commission will then address potential adverse impacts associated with each of the three routes and distinguish differing impacts where necessary. Finally, the Commission will discuss the merits of each of the three proposed route options, and provide its findings on the decision to approve Alternate Route A.

4 Route selection process

4.1 Views of Windrise

20. Windrise explained that its route selection process is iterative and relies on the information collected from internal and external stakeholder engagement as well as engineering and field evaluations.⁵ Windrise contracted Maskwa Environmental Consulting Ltd. to support its project team in implementing a project-specific siting methodology. Further, Windrise stated that it used guidelines and legislation such as Rule 007, Alberta Environment's R&R/11-03: *Environmental Protection Guidelines for Transmission Lines* and other sources to develop its siting methodology for the proposed project.

21. Windrise began its route selection by identifying a project area between the Windy Flats 138S Substation and the Windrise 1063S Substation. It then identified potential routes that followed roads and road allowances, paralleled field breaks, quarter lines, existing power lines and wind turbine arrays and avoided existing and planned development. Further, it identified potential impacts to wetlands, residences and environmentally significant areas.⁶ It stated that it then took the preliminary routes to stakeholders for feedback. Once it completed its route refinement by incorporating stakeholder feedback, Windrise indicated that it narrowed its

⁴ Exhibit 25074-X0080, AUC letter - Deferral of public hearing.

⁵ Exhibit 25074-X0014, Facility Application, PDF page 56.

⁶ Exhibit 25074-X0024, Siting Technical Report, PDF pages 9-11.

potential routes to four options. However, it retired one of these four potential routes (Alternate Route D) next to the Piikani First Nation Reserve No. 1477 as it was the longest, had the highest potential for environmental and agricultural impacts and used the least amount of road allowance when compared to Preferred Route B and alternate routes A and C.⁸

4.2 Views of the interveners

22. Intervener concerns regarding route selection largely relate to the differences between the three route options proposed by Windrise rather than the methodology or criteria that it used to identify the routes.

23. The RASG did not dispute Windrise's route selection methodology and stated that the routing principles it relied on were reasonable and consistent with previous decisions issued by the Commission. However, the RASG argued that, of the three routes identified by Windrise, Alternate Route A is the superior route and poses the least social, economic and environmental impacts.

24. The VCG disputed Windrise's assessment of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the proposed routes, and argued that proximity to farmyards should have been considered as an additional impact category with respect to route selection. Several interveners questioned Windrise's decision to retire Alternate Route D from consideration.

25. The Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26 expressed concern with the number of transmission lines that already exist in the project area, and the planning process that results in multiple transmission lines running along the same roadways.

4.3 Commission findings

26. The preferred and alternate routes developed by Windrise are generally compatible with transmission line development, based on the project siting methodology adopted by Windrise, and take into account factors such as: paralleling existing transmission lines, minimizing construction impacts and risks, avoiding construction impediments and minimizing environmental impacts. The Commission accepts Windrise's decision to retire Alternate Route D on the basis that it was not a viable option when compared to the proposed routes because of its greater length and greater potential for environmental and agricultural impacts.

27. Windrise's use of a route metrics table based on the four categories of potential impacts⁹ selected by Windrise and its environmental consultants was also reasonable and consistent with guidance provided by Rule 007 and previous Commission decisions. With the exception of VCG's concern about impacts to farmyards, all parties agreed with the choice of factors Windrise considered in its metrics table. However, the intervening parties disputed Windrise's application of those factors to assess the potential impacts of each route, and disputed whether Windrise properly quantified or weighed the impacts of the various routes. These concerns are addressed in further detail in the following sections. The concerns raised by the Municipal

⁷ Exhibit 25074-X0025, Route Revision Log, PDF page 29.

⁸ Exhibit 25074-X0014, Facility Application, PDF page 65.

⁹ The categories are listed in Exhibit 25074-X0024, Siting Technical Report, page 29 as: residential, environmental, special considerations and technical considerations.

District of Willow Creek No. 26 largely relate to the need for the Windrise Connection Project, as discussed in Decision 25074-D01-2020.

5 Environmental impacts

28. Windrise retained Maskwa to prepare an environmental evaluation of the proposed project, which considered all three of the routes proposed by Windrise and compared their environmental effects. The environmental evaluation described the environmental components of the study area, including aquatic species (fish) and habitat, groundwater, soils and terrain, surface water bodies, hydrology and wetlands, vegetation species and communities, wildlife species and habitat, historical resources, land use and resource features, and assessed whether the transmission line, located within each of the preferred and alternate routes, would potentially adversely impact these environmental components.

29. The environmental evaluation identified that the transmission line would potentially adversely impact the following environmental components, and performed an effects assessment for each of them: terrain and soils, wetlands, vegetation species and communities, wildlife species and habitat (including amphibians). The effects assessment predicted the significance of various adverse effects both prior to and following mitigation, and concluded that the potential adverse effects of the proposed project can be substantially mitigated with the implementation of project-specific mitigation measures, described in further detail below, along with industry best management practices. Maskwa concluded that the residual adverse effects of the proposed project on each environmental component following the implementation of mitigation measures can be categorized as “not significant” with the exception of any routing in proximity to McBride Lake.

30. Windrise submitted that Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) recommended that the transmission line not be constructed in proximity to McBride Lake. Based on AEP’s recommendation, Windrise stated that Alternate Route C would not be considered an environmentally preferred option.¹⁰

31. Based on the effects assessment completed for the proposed project, Windrise submitted that there is no environmentally preferred route as between Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B, as the environmental impacts of these routes are very similar. However, Preferred Route B would contain a marginally higher proportion of wetlands.

32. The environmental evaluation identified 23 Class 3 to 5 wetlands within the local study area of Preferred Route B, 19 Class 3 to 5 wetlands within the local study area of Alternate Route A and 27 Class 3 to 5 wetlands within the local study area for Alternate Route C.¹¹

33. The environmental evaluation also identified that the centreline of Preferred Route B crosses 3.4 kilometres of native prairie, the centreline of Alternate Route A crosses 2.0 kilometres of native prairie and the centreline of Alternate Route C crosses 6.4 kilometres of native prairie.

¹⁰ Exhibit 25074-X0122, Proponent’s Final Written Argument, PDF page 17.

¹¹ Exhibit 25074-X0027, Environmental Evaluation, PDF page 22.

34. In the environmental evaluation, Maskwa recommended the use of construction matting to reduce ground disturbance and avoid vegetation grubbing in wetlands and riparian areas to minimize effects to wetland vegetation and soils. The environmental evaluation noted that pre-disturbance assessments would be conducted prior to the start of construction to confirm the locations of native grasslands on the selected route to avoid placing temporary workspaces on native grasslands. Maskwa also stated that access on native grassland would be avoided unless under dry or frozen conditions. If construction during wet conditions could not be avoided, Maskwa recommended that clean access matting be utilized.¹²

35. During the consultation process, AEP recommended that all of the proposed project activities be scheduled outside of wildlife-based restricted activity periods. AEP noted the level of existing human-induced disturbances within recommended wildlife setback distances for species of management concern and, as a result, recommended that a detailed mitigation plan be completed on the AUC-approved route.

36. Maskwa appended a draft environmental protection plan (EPP) to its environmental evaluation detailing all recommended mitigation and compliance measures. Windrise stated that the draft EPP would be updated based on the Commission's selection of an approved route,¹³ and would be used to develop a detailed, route-specific mitigation plan which would be provided to AEP for comment prior to construction. Windrise concluded that, based on the effects assessment and its commitment to implementing all the mitigation measures recommended in the environmental evaluation and outlined in the EPP, both Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B would be suitable from an environmental perspective.

37. Windrise explained that the mitigation measures proposed in the environmental evaluation and EPP would comply with all pertinent provincial and federal environmental legislation and guidelines.

38. Windrise submitted that it would develop a detailed conservation and reclamation plan for areas of native prairie and native grasslands crossed by the proposed project. It further stated that this plan would address temporary and progressive conservation and reclamation activities for the periods prior to, during and following the construction of the proposed project.¹⁴

5.1 Views of the Route A Support Group

39. The RASG expressed concerns regarding the potential impacts of the proposed project on the environment. The specific concerns identified by the RASG included potential impacts on wetlands, McBride Lake, wildlife, birds and habitats, native grasslands, and potential increases in snow drift.

40. Mr. Cliff Wallis, a professional biologist, was retained by the RASG to prepare an environmental assessment of the proposed project. The assessment focused on environmentally significant areas, native wetlands and grassland habitats, existing linear disturbances, and species of management concern. In preparing his environmental assessment, Mr. Wallis conducted a one-day field visit in July 2020, as well as a review of Windrise's environmental evidence.

¹² Exhibit 25074-X0027, Environmental Evaluation, PDF pages 52-54.

¹³ Exhibit 25074-X0014, Facility Application, PDF page 86.

¹⁴ Exhibit 25074-X0071, Windrise Wind Energy Inc. Information responses round 1, pdf page 21.

41. Mr. Wallis submitted that there are significant differences from an environmental perspective between the three route options. He stated that Alternate Route C would have the greatest environmental impact followed by the Preferred Route and then Alternate Route A. He submitted that Alternate Route A has the least impact as it avoids environmental features by paralleling Highway 810. Mr. Wallis agreed with AEP's recommendation to avoid constructing the transmission line in proximity to McBride Lake.

42. Mr. Wallis also observed that Alternate Route C presented the greatest infringement on sensitive habitat for species of management concern while Alternate Route A had the least impact, followed by Preferred Route B. Mr. Wallis noted that Maskwa had not identified any environmental disadvantages associated with Preferred Route B, and submitted that, in his view, the disadvantages from an environmental perspective would include the fact that Preferred Route B would require workspace on native prairie and a private right-of-way within wetland areas.

43. Mr. Wallis recommended that, if the proposed project is approved, a condition of approval should be that any work in and around wetlands or on native grasslands be conducted under frozen ground conditions or with the use of access matting. He noted that the EPP prepared by Maskwa proposed a suite of mitigations that should reduce the impacts on wetlands, native grasslands, and associated biodiversity to an acceptable level for both Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B.¹⁵

5.2 Views of the Vallieres/Chester Group

44. The VCG expressed support for Alternate Route C and disputed the conclusions of Windrise and the RASG that Alternate Route C was less preferable from an environmental perspective. The VCG submitted that all three routes cross a similar number of Class 3 to 5 wetlands and, with the exception of McBride Lake, are similar with respect to the amount of surface water area within 800 metres. The VCG argued that there is a lack of evidence suggesting that Alternate Route C will detrimentally affect avian use of McBride Lake and that, even if it did, bird diverter markers could be placed on conductor wires to mitigate any negative impacts. The VCG expressed the view that any Alternate Route C infringement upon wetland areas would be minor and could be easily mitigated.

45. With regard to native prairie, the VCG argued that given the existing disturbances in the local areas, including multiple wind power projects and associated access roads, it is unclear how much native prairie remains in a pristine state. As a result, the VCG questioned the basis for AEP's concerns with infringing upon native prairie on undeveloped municipal road allowances in the area. The VCG submitted that installing the proposed project along Alternate Route C in the developed and undeveloped road allowances would be less intrusive to the surrounding native prairie than the previously approved collector lines for the Windrise Wind Power Project.

46. The VCG questioned the accuracy of Windrise's bird surveys completed for the environmental evaluation and requested that the Commission ensure that Windrise's bird surveys are current. The VCG indicated that it believed the actual number of raptor nests in the area to be significantly higher than identified in Maskwa's environmental evaluation as no one from Windrise requested access to the VCG members' properties to conduct nest surveys. The VCG emphasized the importance of farmyard trees and shelterbelts to birds of prey. In particular, the

¹⁵ Exhibit 25074-X0117, Appendix A – Evidence of Cliff Wallis, at PDF page 48.

VCG noted that raptors are frequently observed in trees on the shelterbelt running north along the east side of Highway 810, that great horned owls nest in the Vallieres' old granaries, and that a ferruginous hawk has been sighted in the shelterbelt west of the Vallieres' residence. The VCG submitted that Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B have more residences with farmyard trees and shelterbelts and would therefore have a higher population of raptors when compared with Alternate Route C.¹⁶

47. In response to the views of the RASG, the VCG argued that both Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B impact a relatively similar amount of native prairie, and that no right-of-way within wetland areas would be required along Preferred Route B as there is sufficient room in the undeveloped road allowances. With regard to Mr. Wallis's environmental assessment, the VCG submitted that much of the wetlands crossed along Preferred Route B and Alternate Route C are seasonal and dry. The VCG stated that Alternate Route A would cross the most wildlife setbacks while Alternate Route C would impact fewer species.

48. The VCG challenged RASG's characterization of the environmental impacts posed by Alternate Route C, and concluded that none of the parties involved in the proceeding have provided evidence that Alternate Route C will result in more bird strikes along wetland areas. The VCG argued that AEP has already approved numerous wind farms and power lines in the area and would have information available related to bird strikes if issues had been identified.

5.3 Views of Windrise

49. In written argument, Windrise addressed the evidence of Mr. Wallis, and expressed general agreement with Mr. Wallis's environmental analysis. Windrise characterized its views with respect to the viability and constructability of the three proposed routes as being consistent with Mr. Wallis's assessment, with the exception of a difference of opinion regarding which route should be considered preferred. Noting that Mr. Wallis had only considered the environmental impacts of each route, and not addressed other route selection criteria, Windrise submitted that it did not take issue with Mr. Wallis's assessment and reiterated that it was willing to build any of the proposed routes that the AUC approves.¹⁷

50. In response to concerns raised by the VCG regarding the adequacy of Windrise's bird surveys, Windrise submitted that VCG members granted access to their land on several occasions for the purpose of conducting wildlife surveys and that multiple conversations between VCG members and field personnel had occurred. Further, Windrise indicated that the project surveys were conducted in accordance with the AEP *Sensitive Species Inventory Guidelines*. Windrise also addressed the VCG's concerns regarding its consideration of native prairie, stating that impacts to native prairie were considered in the route determination process, along with a number of other relevant route assessment factors, with the objective of identifying routes that would pose lower levels of potential impacts when all factors were considered collectively.¹⁸

5.4 Commission findings

51. The environmental evaluation prepared by Maskwa concluded that, with sufficient mitigation measures, either Alternate Route A or Preferred Route B is suitable from an environmental perspective. This conclusion was generally supported by Mr. Wallis, who noted

¹⁶ Exhibit 25074-X0127, Final Argument Submission of Chesters and Vallieres, PDF pages 22-28.

¹⁷ Exhibit 25074-X0132, Proponent's reply argument, PDF page 9.

¹⁸ Exhibit 25074-X0132, Proponent's reply argument, PDF page 13.

that the proposed mitigation measures should reduce the impacts of Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B on wetlands, grasslands and associated biodiversity to an acceptable level.

52. The Commission accepts the environmental evaluation's conclusion that, except for routing in close proximity to McBride Lake, the potential environmental effects of the proposed project would be "not significant" and finds that the environmental effects of the proposed project can be adequately mitigated, given diligent implementation of the mitigation measures proposed in the environmental evaluation and EPP, and the commitments made by Windrise.

53. The Commission accepts the evidence of Windrise and Mr. Wallis and finds that Alternate Route C would have the largest impact on the environment. In addition, the Commission agrees with Mr. Wallis on behalf of the RASG that the Preferred Route B would have the next largest impact due to the number of easements, wetland infringements and structures located within undeveloped road allowances.

54. Windrise has committed to completing a detailed mitigation plan for the approved route as recommended by AEP, providing AEP an opportunity to review the plan and incorporating any recommendations of AEP prior to the start of construction. Windrise has also committed to continually updating its EPP until the start of construction and to complying with the mitigation in its environmental evaluation and its EPP.¹⁹ Windrise also committed to provide a copy of its route-specific detailed mitigation plan to the Commission at least two months prior to the start of construction.

55. Regarding the VCG's concerns with the adequacy of the bird surveys completed for the proposed project, the Commission notes that all wildlife surveys including breeding bird and raptor surveys were found to be adequate by AEP and were completed in accordance with the *AEP Sensitive Species Inventory Guidelines*. In addition, the mitigation measures in the environmental evaluation include conducting wildlife sweeps prior to any construction to identify wildlife features including nests and dens. These mitigation measures will be updated and reviewed by AEP to reflect the final route selection prior to construction. Therefore, the Commission is satisfied that any project activities will be informed by a current and route-specific understanding of wildlife activity.

56. AEP recommended avoiding siting the transmission line in proximity to McBride Lake as there would be an increased bird collision risk as a result of this lake being used as a migratory stopover for a large number of birds. Alternate Route C is the only proposed route that is in proximity to McBride Lake. In addition, Alternate Route C would cross the highest number of native wetlands, infringe on the highest number of wetland setbacks and cross the largest amount of native grassland that could provide suitable habitat for species of management concern including raptors. For these reasons, the Commission agrees with the views of Windrise, AEP and Mr. Wallis regarding the heightened environmental impacts associated with Alternate Route C, and finds that Alternate Route C is the least preferable route from an environmental perspective.

57. Both Mr. Wallis and Maskwa identified accessing project areas that contain wetlands or native grassland during dry or frozen conditions as an important mitigation measure. The Commission agrees, and expects that Windrise will conduct its construction activities during

¹⁹ Exhibit 25074-X0014, Facility Application, PDF page 86, paragraph 301- 304.

frozen conditions or dry conditions to the maximum extent possible. In limited circumstances, should activities need to be undertaken during non-frozen or non-dry conditions, the Commission is satisfied that Windrise's commitment to the use of clean access matting, as described in the environmental evaluation, would be an acceptable form mitigation to reduce potential adverse effects to undisturbed wetlands or native grassland.

58. The Commission is satisfied that if Windrise adheres to the above commitments, including abiding with all pertinent provincial and federal environmental legislation and guidelines, the identified environmental effects of Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B can be mitigated to a reasonable degree. Further, Alternate Route A would result in the fewest environmental impacts requiring mitigation and is therefore preferable from an environmental perspective.

59. The Commission accepts Windrise's commitment to consult with AEP to revise its EPP and develop and implement a route-specific mitigation plan prior to the beginning of construction and expects Windrise to follow through on its commitment.

6 Landowner impacts

6.1 Health effects of electromagnetic fields

6.1.1 Views of the interveners

60. Members of the RASG expressed concerns regarding the health impacts of exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs) associated with the proposed project. The RASG stated that Windrise should be required to identify the anticipated EMFs from the proposed project and calculate the cumulative effect of EMFs from the proposed project and other nearby electric facilities. The RASG submitted that the results of this calculation should be provided to its members. It argued that cumulative EMF impacts are especially important to consider due to the number of other transmission lines in the area, which may increase the EMF levels at RASG's members' homes and yards.²⁰

61. David and Bobbi Cook expressed concerns that EMFs would impact the health of their family and livestock.

62. Wade and Denise Chester, Tim Donahue, and Wendy and John McKinnon also expressed concerns regarding the health impacts of exposure to EMFs associated with the proposed project.

6.1.2 Views of Windrise

63. Windrise stated that information regarding EMFs and health impacts has been provided in the application and subsequent Windrise filings, and that EMF materials were also made available at the open houses. Windrise stated that it distributed information that was intended to explain the nature of EMFs associated with transmission lines, and that based on available research, EMFs from transmission lines are not viewed as a health concern by independent experts in the field.

64. Windrise submitted that research on possible adverse health effects from exposure to EMFs has been conducted for more than 40 years. It further submitted that this research has been

²⁰ Exhibit 25074-X0124, RASG Written Argument, PDF page 26.

reviewed and summarized by Health Canada and the World Health Organization, which have not found any conclusive evidence that exposure to EMFs from transmission lines causes any long-term adverse effect to human health. Windrise also stated that it follows the guidance of Health Canada and the World Health Organization, and that the proposed project would not exceed any recommended exposure levels.

6.1.3 Commission findings

65. The Commission acknowledges that interveners are concerned about the health effects associated with the EMF produced by the transmission line.

66. The Commission has previously held that it cannot give weight to opinion evidence about the health effects of EMFs from lay witnesses given the complexity of the topic. However, the interveners' submissions demonstrate that many potentially affected parties are apprehensive about possible effects on human and animal health associated with EMFs from the proposed project.

67. In the absence of expert evidence suggesting otherwise, the Commission places significant weight on the World Health Organization's conclusion that, based on available research data, exposure to EMFs is unlikely to constitute a serious health hazard, and also on Health Canada's conclusion that exposure to EMFs from transmission lines is not a demonstrated cause of any long-term adverse effect to human or animal health. Accordingly, the Commission finds that there is no evidence to suggest that EMFs from the transmission line will result in any adverse health effects.

6.2 Residential impacts

6.2.1 Views of the interveners

68. Intervening landowners expressed concerns about the impacts of the proposed project on their residential properties, including noise and visual impacts, as well as impacts to property value.

69. VCG members stated that they are subject to cumulative visual impacts from the number of power lines and wind farms within the local area. They also indicated that local realtors have found that close proximity to wind turbines and power lines reduces property values.²¹ The VCG submitted that with more time, it could have obtained an expert report showing that the presence of wind turbines and power lines reduce property values in this area, but noted that logically, closer proximity to wind turbines and power lines results in more disturbances that devalue property. The VCG also argued that Alternate Route C is the superior route as it would affect the least number of residences.

70. The RASG members indicated that they would experience adverse impacts should Preferred Route B or Alternate Route C be approved. These concerns included noise from the transmission line, traffic and noise associated with the construction of the transmission line, cumulative visual impacts from the number of transmission lines and wind projects within the local area, and the proposed project's potential to diminish enjoyment of their lands.

²¹ Exhibit 25074-X0127, Final Argument Submission of Chesters and Vallieres, PDF pages 14 and 17.

6.2.2 Views of Windrise

71. Windrise submitted that structure siting was discussed with landowners to address site-specific visual concerns to the extent possible considering the structure type being proposed. Further, Windrise explained that routes were refined to favour alignments that run parallel with existing transmission lines, to group visual impact of the new segments with existing visual impacts.²²

72. Windrise submitted that Alternate Route C has the fewest number of residences in proximity to a proposed route, however the number of affected residences along all routes is low as seen in Figure 2 below.

Final route metrics	Route A Alternate Route	Route B Preferred Route	Route C Alternate Route
Residential impacts			
Residences within 50 m of route (#)	1	1	0
Residences within 100 m of route (#)	7	8	4
Residences within 150 m of route (#)	11	10	5
Residences within 150 m of route (#) – Newly Exposed	10	10	5
Residences within 200 m of route (#)	11	10	5
Residences within 800 m of route (#)	19	18	12
Residences within 800 m of route (#) – Newly Exposed	14	15	9

Figure 2: Residential impacts comparison²³

73. Windrise filed a noise impact assessment summary form prepared by SLR Consulting (Canada) Ltd. SLR Consulting submitted that noise modelling had not been conducted for the proposed project as there are no significant noise sources associated with the normal operation of a transmission line. Windrise confirmed that it would ensure compliance with Rule 012: *Noise Control* and applicable municipal noise bylaws during construction.

6.2.3 Commission findings

74. Many interveners raised concerns about a variety of potential impacts that they believe the proposed project would have on their residential properties, including property devaluation, visual impacts and noise.

75. Some of the concerns raised by interveners regarding property values referenced the effects of wind turbines in the area. In this regard, the Commission notes that its focus in this decision is on the impacts associated with the proposed transmission line, and not with other projects.

76. As it has found in many previous decisions, the Commission considers that property valuation is a complex and technical issue requiring specialized knowledge and expertise. The Commission maintains its view that it cannot give weight to non-expert opinion evidence about

²² Exhibit 25074-X0014, Facility Application, PDF page 70.

²³ Exhibit 25074-X0014, Facility Application, PDF page 68.

property values. Given the lack of expert evidence to demonstrate an adverse impact on property values, the Commission finds that the interveners' concerns are not substantiated.

77. The Commission acknowledges that any of the proposed routes will result in some incremental visual impact. The Commission considers that the assessment of visual impacts is inherently subjective, but recognizes that the imposition of new transmission structures can significantly alter a viewscape. The Commission finds that Windrise's application contains a number of mitigating measures to reduce these types of impacts to the extent practical. For example, siting the transmission line within the road allowance and paralleling existing linear developments will generally reduce visual impacts. Further, the ability to shift structure locations along the centreline between deflection locations to address potential site-specific concerns raised by landowners will also mitigate visual impacts. The Commission expects that, to the extent possible, Windrise will incorporate specific feedback from affected landowners in determining final structure locations.

78. The Commission recognizes that impacts from transmission lines are generally reduced with distance. The Commission finds, given the number of residences within 50 metres, 100 metres, and 150 metres, that Alternate Route C would have lower residential impacts whereas Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B would have similar potential for residential impacts. However, the Commission finds that by locating the transmission line within road allowances and paralleling existing linear disturbances, the residential impacts associated with the proposed routes would be considerably mitigated and it does not expect residential impacts to be significant.

79. Lastly, with respect to noise, the Commission accepts Windrise's evidence that the transmission line will not be a significant source of audible noise and is satisfied with Windrise's commitments to comply with the requirements of Rule 012 and with applicable bylaws as those pertain to construction noise.

6.3 Traffic safety

6.3.1 Views of the interveners

80. The VCG stated that construction along Highway 810 is a safety concern as it is a heavily trafficked road. John and Linda Vallieres stated that Windrise may store structures and materials in the ditch along Highway 810 during construction, which would not be safe as there is minimal flat land between the highway and private land and materials could blow onto the roadway. VCG submitted that Preferred Route B and Alternate Route A would require more traffic control due to construction disturbances.²⁴

81. The RASG submitted that there would be more traffic interruption along the north portion of Preferred Route B than the north portion of Alternate Route A due to the width of the road allowance. Consequently, it submitted that Alternate Route A was more favourable.

6.3.2 Views of Windrise

82. Windrise submitted that it is committed to safety for its employees, contractors and the public. If the terrain is not suitable for ditch construction, access on private land would be pursued. Storage of construction material in ditches would be for short durations only, and

²⁴ Exhibit 25074-X0082, Windrise Wind Energy Inc. Intervener IR Responses, PDF page 12.

appropriate traffic control safety measures would be in place. Work in ditches or road allowances would be performed in accordance with Alberta Transportation traffic accommodation and safety plans. This approach is consistent with standard industry construction practices for transmission lines in Alberta and would be governed by applicable legislation and associated agreements with the municipality and Alberta Transportation. Windrise committed to developing a traffic accommodation plan for the proposed project to outline the planned approach, the risks involved, and the proposed mitigation strategies to avoid or minimize potential traffic impacts during the construction phase.

83. Windrise also stated that traffic disruption is expected to be minimal and relatively short-term in nature. Traffic disruption would be limited to individual locations where crews would be working during the construction period. The entire construction period is expected to be a total of two to three months for any of the proposed route options.

6.3.3 Commission findings

84. The Commission accepts Windrise's commitment to develop a traffic accommodation plan to mitigate or minimize potential traffic impacts during construction of the proposed project and to perform work in ditches or road allowances in accordance with Alberta Transportation traffic accommodation and safety plans. The Commission finds that the proposed project poses a low risk to traffic safety and that the impacts will be temporary. Lastly, there are potential traffic safety advantages and disadvantages to each of the routes, but on balance traffic safety does not favour one route over another.

7 Agricultural impacts

7.1 Noxious weeds

7.1.1 Views of the interveners

85. RASG members expressed concern regarding potential contamination of its members lands resulting from the introduction of soil-borne diseases or with the spread of noxious weeds during the construction, operation, maintenance and reclamation of the proposed project.

86. The VCG also expressed concerns about the spread of noxious weeds in the area. It requested that the Commission impose the following conditions on the approval to address this concern:

- Windrise must identify to landowners where their construction equipment is coming from, and give prior notice of that equipment arriving, before construction begins.
- Windrise must ensure all construction equipment to arrive at the local area in a cleaned condition.
- Windrise shall conduct weed surveys to identify the weed species that already exist along the proposed power line routes and ensure that equipment is cleaned between adjacent landowner properties so that noxious weeds are not spread between properties.

87. The VCG asserted that the Crown requires the cleaning of equipment between grasslands and cultivated land and the same should be applied to the private land that Windrise would be crossing.

7.1.2 Views of Windrise

88. Windrise submitted that it would prepare and execute an EPP, as required by AEP, setting out mitigation measures to prevent the spread of noxious weeds, as well as its plan for controlling weeds on all lands where construction is planned. The specific weed and soil disease mitigation measures proposed by Maskwa in the environmental evaluation include ensuring that all equipment and vehicles are clean and free of soil or vegetation debris that could contain weed seeds or propagules, revegetating disturbed soils as soon as possible using native seed mixes to prevent the establishment of invasive species, and obtaining fill material from sources reasonably known to be free of clubroot, excessive weeds or invasive species. Windrise committed to the mitigation measures recommended in the environmental evaluation and indicated that it would include them in its revised EPP. Windrise further submitted that the proposed project is not located in a known clubroot infestation county, but that it would commit to following a clubroot cleaning protocol that includes applying a mild bleach solution to equipment before entering particular areas as requested by landowners.

7.2 Structures and guy wires

7.2.1 View of the interveners

89. The RASG expressed concerns that the placement of transmission structures could interfere with agricultural operations. As the size of farm equipment generally increases over time, David and Bobbi Cook are concerned that their equipment could make contact with the transmission line. The RASG requested that any Commission approval include the following condition:

- Windrise shall address any ground clearance issues that arise in the future and ensure that members of the RASG continue to have unimpeded and safe access to their farmlands.

7.2.2 Views of Windrise

90. Windrise stated that the proposed project would predominantly use self-supporting, direct embedded wood or steel poles. In some instances, supported structures, such as those with anchored guy wires, would be used at route corners, multi-pole, deflections or at crossings where longer than typical spans occur.

91. Windrise stated that it would not hold landowners liable for inadvertent or accidental damage to the transmission line resulting from contact with farm equipment, but that damage to farm equipment would be the responsibility of the equipment owner and operator.²⁵

92. Windrise submitted that field entrances would be designed to a minimum of 6.7 metres vertical clearance which would meet the clearance required for transmission lines in the *Alberta Electric Utility Code*. Windrise submitted that concerns regarding over-sized equipment, would be managed on a case-by-case basis by AltaLink's stakeholder relations representatives.²⁶

²⁵ Exhibit 25074-X0113, Windrise_Wind_Energy_Inc. - Cook_IR_Responses - Part 2, PDF page 17.

²⁶ Exhibit 25074-X0113, Windrise_Wind_Energy_Inc. - Cook_IR_Responses - Part 2, PDF page 14.

7.3 Farming operations and fencing

93. The members of the RASG grow crops and use their lands for livestock grazing and expressed concern with the proposed project's impacts to their agricultural activities and land.

94. John and Linda Vallieres expressed concerns that the transmission line may transfer electric energy to their fences and interfere with their GPS equipment.

95. As Windrise stated that it may need to remove fencing to install the transmission structures, the VCG requested that any approval from the Commission require Windrise to:

- Provide at least 72 hours notice before fences are taken down.
- Provide at least 72 hours notice before surveying and construction access along Highway 810.
- Compensate for rounding up cattle that may be impacted and pay for alternate feed sources that would be required.
- Fully indemnify the intervenors for any liability associated with cattle escaping the field and causing accidents on Highway 810.
- Replace the entire fence with a five-strand, braced and tightened fence along the power line ROW at the end of construction.
- Ensure that the fences are grounded due to the potential of electrical shock from induction.

96. The VCG also submitted that Windrise should conduct its disturbance outside of "the farming season".²⁷

7.3.1 Views of Windrise

97. Windrise submitted that it would not need to relocate fencing should a five-metre easement be provided. However, Windrise committed that should the proposed project impact any fencing, it would address the issues as they arise.

7.4 Commission findings

98. The Commission recognizes that the proposed project has the potential for agricultural impacts in a number of different ways.

99. The Commission understands the concerns of farmers about their equipment or livestock coming into contact with structures or guy wires and recognizes that additional care is required in operating around these facilities. Although the transmission line routes were selected to maximize the use of developed and undeveloped road allowances, each of the proposed routes will require construction and maintenance easements on private land that have the potential to impact agricultural activities. Specifically, Alternate Route A has three supported structures while Preferred Route B has seven and Alternate Route C has nine and certain transmission line structures requiring support infrastructure may result in a loss of available farmland as Windrise

²⁷ Exhibit 25074-X0127, Final Argument Submission of Chesters and Vallieres, PDF page 20, paragraph 68.

would require permanent easements for guy wires. The evidence demonstrates, however, that none of the interveners in this proceeding would be required to host permanent infrastructure along Alternate Route A.

100. The Commission acknowledges the concerns raised by the VCG relating to agricultural impacts posed by construction along Highway 810 and recognizes the potential impacts of the transmission line on agricultural activities. The Commission notes, however, that it is tasked with ensuring that any project that is approved is in the public interest, which necessarily requires that if the Commission decides a project is needed, it must determine whether it is possible to approve the project in a manner that mitigates the project's impacts to an acceptable degree.

101. The Commission recognizes that the new transmission line will comply with the *Alberta Electrical Utility Code* and that Windrise has committed to consulting with stakeholders about the location of structures on a case-by-case basis. In addition, the Commission is satisfied that the design of the proposed project and mitigations proposed sufficiently address the issue of clearances.

102. The Commission finds that Windrise's practices and procedures to reduce the spread of soil-borne diseases and noxious weeds are reasonable. Windrise has incorporated practices identified under the Government of Alberta's *Weed Control Act* and the proposed project is not located in a known clubroot infestation county. Notwithstanding, Windrise committed to implementing mitigation measures detailed in its environmental evaluation that include vehicle and equipment cleaning, and to following a clubroot cleaning protocol where requested by landowners.

103. Regarding electrical effects from the transmission line, the Commission notes that Windrise committed to conducting pre-construction EMF measurements for stakeholders who raise concerns in relation to radio interference, and would also work with stakeholders post-construction to mitigate EMF interference caused by its facilities. Windrise also committed to grounding fences, as required, while it operates the transmission line. The Commission is satisfied that these commitments will adequately mitigate the electrical effects of the transmission line.

104. More generally, the Commission has considered the practices that Windrise has committed to implement to mitigate agricultural impacts, as well as its commitment to working with landowners throughout the construction of the proposed project. Importantly, Windrise has committed to providing access to project representatives through a dedicated phone line and email address. The Commission expects that Windrise will promptly respond to specific landowner inquiries, including requests about weed management, structure placements, and electrical effects that are brought to its attention in this manner.

105. The Commission finds that the commitments made by Windrise are reasonable and that there is no need to impose the additional conditions proposed by the RASG or the VCG related to agricultural impacts. The Commission expects that if issues regarding agricultural impacts arise Windrise will work diligently with landowners to resolve them. However, if landowners feel that Windrise has not adhered to its commitments, including those set out in its EPP, they can raise the issue with the Commission.

8 Route selection

8.1 Views of Windrise

106. Windrise submitted that Alternate Route C would impact the fewest residences but have a higher impact on both the environment and agricultural operations. Windrise stated that Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B are similar in almost all impact categories. It stated Preferred Route B would have the least amount of disruption to traffic on Highway 810, addresses some of the concerns raised by the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26 regarding minimizing the length of Highway 810 that contains multiple transmission lines, and incorporates specific stakeholder feedback that arose during its PIP.

107. Windrise argued that Preferred Route B has the least cumulative impact when accounting for all the social and economic impacts. However, it stated that the differences between Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B are marginal and it would construct any of the routes proposed or a combination of the proposed routes in the application.

8.2 Views of the RASG

108. Members of the RASG expressed concerns regarding Preferred Route B and Alternate Route C. Robert Rippin and Niesje Vanden Dool stated that the shared portion of Preferred Route B and Alternate Route C, along Range Road 264, is a narrow one-lane gravel road used to transport large agricultural equipment and windfarm industrial equipment. An additional transmission line would enclose the road with transmission lines on either side, which presents a safety concern and is contrary to the policies of the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26.

109. The RASG submitted that although Alternate Route A and Preferred Route B are comparable when considering the residential impacts, Alternate Route A has fewer residences within 100 metres of the proposed route. The RASG further argued that although Alternate Route C has the least total number of impacted residences, it has the largest environmental impact as acknowledged by Windrise, AEP and Mr. Wallis.

110. The RASG submitted that Highway 810 has the widest road allowance of all the roads in the project area, and that Alternate Route A would utilize the greatest amount of developed road allowance thereby reducing overall environmental impact.

111. The RASG argued that Alternate Route A would parallel the greatest length of existing transmission infrastructure which reduces the overall visual impact. Further, it submitted that Alternate Route A would have the least number of 90-degree transmission structures, which results in less interference with agricultural operations due to a reduced number of guy wires used in supporting structures.

8.3 Views of the VCG

112. The VCG requested that the Commission approve Alternate Route C as it has the least number of impacted residences and least amount of construction impact.

113. The VCG stated that its members will oppose Windrise's right-of-way in front of the Surface Rights Board if Alternate Route A or Preferred Route B is approved but would agree to the right-of-way on their lands if Alternate Route C is approved. The VCG requested that the

Commission condition any approval on Windrise discussing specific pole placements with landowners before applying to the Surface Rights Board for expropriation.

114. The VCG also questioned why Windrise did not include the number of farmyards that would be impacted by a transmission line in its comparison of the routes. The VCG submitted that Alternate Route C has the least impact on farmyards. The VCG submitted that its members run cattle along Highway 810 and construction and maintenance of a transmission line along Alternate Route A or Preferred Route B would negatively impact their cattle operations.

115. The VCG stated that the road allowances along Highway 810 are narrow, which is why Windrise is requesting a five-metre easement adjacent to the road allowance for construction laydown and maintenance access. The VCG argued that Alternate Route C would have the most transmission line located within undeveloped road allowance, at 12.7 kilometres, and may not require a five-metre easement. Further, the VCG submitted that some of the residences along Alternate Route C have shelterbelts which would likely obstruct their view of a transmission line making it preferable to Alternate Route A or Preferred Route B.

116. The VCG argued that its members are subject to cumulative visual impacts from the number of transmission lines and wind farms within the local area. The VCG stated that TransAlta Corporation owns and operates five windfarms and substations in the area and there has been little co-ordination between AltaLink and TransAlta Corporation. The VCG argued that rural stakeholders and landowners unfairly bear the negative impacts associated with transmission lines that are determined by the Commission to be in the broader public interest, and that there is no mechanism in Alberta to compensate landowners for intangible adverse impacts. The VCG submitted that this is a form of cross-subsidization whereby rural landowners disproportionately incur the negative impacts associated with renewable energy projects that benefit all Albertans.

117. The VCG argued that individuals who elect to host wind turbines and related infrastructure on their lands, and receive compensation for doing so, are partially responsible for the need for associated transmission lines and should bear the resulting inconvenience. In this case, the VCG submitted that this principle supports locating the line along Alternate Route C.

8.4 Views of Bob DeCecco

118. Bob DeCecco submitted that he agrees with the arguments made by the RASG and requested that the Commission approve Alternate Route A. He stated further, that the south half of Preferred Route B and Alternate Route A situated along Highway 810 already have transmission lines present and are better suited for maintenance.

8.5 Views of Wendy and John McKinnon

119. Wendy and John McKinnon requested that the Commission approve Preferred Route B. They expressed concern about the EMFs that may affect them as Alternate Route A would travel close to their residence.

8.6 Views of Tim Donahue

120. Tim Donahue stated that he and his family oppose Alternate Route A as it is close to their residence. He stated further, that Preferred Route B would be in proximity to at least nine homes which would make it the most invasive route.

8.7 Commission findings

121. After careful consideration of the record of the proceeding, and for the reasons provided elsewhere in this decision and in Decision 25074-D01-2020, the Commission finds that approval of the transmission line is in the public interest. The Commission has reviewed the submissions of each party regarding the relative advantages and disadvantages of the three proposed route options. In doing so, the Commission has weighed the respective social, economic, and environmental impacts of the routes. The Commission has decided to grant approval to Alternate Route A.

122. No evidence has been adduced to demonstrate that noise or health effects favour any one route. The Commission finds that intervenor concerns related to electrical effects are common to all of the proposed routes. Further, Windrise has taken reasonable steps to mitigate these concerns to an acceptable degree. Accordingly, the Commission finds that there is no evidence related to health, noise and electrical effects that supports approving one route over the other.

123. The Commission acknowledges the VCG's argument that routing decisions should incorporate principles of cost causation, which it says favour the allocation of negative impacts to parties who participate in projects necessitating transmission infrastructure. In determining which route to approve in this proceeding, however, the Commission has examined each of the proposed route options with regard to its overall impacts, including potential environmental, residential and agricultural impacts.

124. Having determined that any health, noise and electrical effects do not support one route over the others, the Commission has considered the environmental, residential and agricultural impacts of each of the preferred and alternate routes and finds that Alternate Route A has the lowest overall impacts.

125. As previously found in this decision, the Commission finds that Alternate Route C would have the largest impact on the environment and that Preferred Route B would have the next largest impact due to the number of easements, wetland infringements and structures located within undeveloped road allowances.

126. With respect to visual impacts, and impacts on the use and enjoyment of land, the Commission finds that Alternate Route A is centred primarily along a heavily-used highway and parallels the largest amount of existing transmission line, resulting in fewer incremental impacts than the other route options.

127. The Commission finds that, in general, Alternate Route A's alignment along Highway 810 contributes to its lower environmental impacts relative to Preferred Route B and Alternate Route C. Further, the Commission finds that the potential agricultural impacts of Route A are lower compared to Route C, because Route A follows a larger transportation corridor in Highway 810 compared to Range Road 264. In addition, Alternate Route A will require the fewest support structures requiring permanent easements for the placement of guy wires.

128. The Commission finds that Windrise's applications comply with the information requirements prescribed in Rule 007. Having reviewed the participant involvement program undertaken by Windrise, the Commission also finds that it meets the requirements of Rule 007. Lastly, the Commission finds that the facility applications are consistent with the need identified

in the AESO's needs identification document and approved by the Commission in Decision 25074-D01-2020.

9 Decision

129. Pursuant to sections 14, 15, 18 and 19 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act*, the Commission approves the applications and grants Windrise Wind Energy Inc. the approvals set out in the following appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Permit and Licence 25074-D05-2020 – November 16, 2020, to construct and operate Transmission Line 497L.
- Appendix 2 – Connection Order 25074-D06-2020 – November 16, 2020, to connect Transmission Line 497L to the Alberta Interconnected Electric System.

130. The appendices will be distributed separately.

Dated on November 16, 2020.

Alberta Utilities Commission

(original signed by)

Kristi Sebalj
Panel Chair

(original signed by)

Merete Heggelund
Acting Commission Member

Appendix 1 – Proceeding participants

Name of organization (abbreviation) Company name of counsel or representative
Windrise Wind Energy Ltd. (Windrise) Maskwa Environmental Consulting Ltd. (Maskwa) Counsel: I. Maharaj
Route A Support Group (RASG) Counsel: I. Okoye Members: R. Rippin N. Vanden Dool D. and B. Cook
Vallieres Chester Group (VCG) Representative: D. Bennett Members: W., J. and D. Chester J. and L. Vallieres
Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26 Representative: C. Chisholm
AltaLink Management Ltd. (AltaLink) K. McGlone
Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) B. Hill
W. and J. McKinnon
B. DeCecco
T. Donahue