BLACK FORK

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Brookings, SD 57006

To the People of South Dakota, our land and rural landscapes are among our most valuable assets. As stewards of this land, we have a responsibility to protect its beauty, productive use, and livability for future generations.

The proposed 90-mile, 765 kV transmission line through eastern South Dakota would introduce towers typically 150 to 175 feet tall into a landscape of farms, homes, lakes, and open prairie. Over a potential service life approaching 100 years, the route could influence where our children, grandchildren, and future residents choose to establish homes.

National research shows that rural residential development deserves consideration in long-term land-use decisions. American Farmland Trust's 2020 report, *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*, found that nearly 7 million acres of American farmland and ranchland transitioned to low-density residential use between 2001 and 2016. That exceeded the 4.1 million acres converted to urban and highly developed uses during the same period. These findings document the substantial footprint of families choosing to move into rural areas to live, raise families, and retire. American Farmland Trust report

USDA's Economic Research Service also reports that net migration added approximately 974,000 people to nonmetropolitan counties between 2020 and 2024, with approximately 69 percent of that gain attributable to domestic migration. These findings demonstrate continuing demand for rural living, although the strength of that demand varies substantially by location. USDA, Population & Migration

These national trends warrant a local assessment of future residential opportunities along the proposed route. County population totals alone cannot tell us how many families may wish to build on inherited land, establish a country acreage, or live near parents and grandparents over the coming decades.

I ask the Commission to require an evaluation of the project's effects on future rural homesites, supported by local building-permit records, rural parcel development, population and migration data, and county land-use plans. That evaluation should identify both restrictions imposed by easements and setbacks and potential effects on the desirability of nearby homesites.

Before committing this valued natural landscape to a major transmission corridor, the people of South Dakotans deserve a clear accounting of its long-term costs, benefits, and alternatives.

The opportunity for future generations to live on this land should carry substantial weight in the decisions we make today.



Gordon Ommen