

Sen. Baucus rips Bonneville plan

S.R.
4-9-80

ST. IGNATIUS, Mont. (AP) — The Bonneville Power Administration's plan to build transmission lines through the western part of the state to carry power generated at Colstrip is "an attempt by the Montana Power Co. to avoid the Montana Siting Act," according to Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont.

Baucus, speaking here Monday night, told an audience of about 45 persons that he only learned of the BPA's plan to build the lines about a month ago. He said authorization for BPA to build the lines came in the 1977 federal budget.

Baucus said the language of the federal act authorizing the project was "very ambiguous," and he isn't sure that it was the intent of Congress to authorize the lines.

The BPA says it wants to build two 500-kilovolt lines to transport electricity to the West Coast that is generated at the Colstrip power plants, owned by MPC and other utilities.

Three routes are being considered for the lines. One would use an easement BPA already has on the Flathead Indian Reservation. A second would go through the Nine Mile area toward Hot Springs, and the third would run from Missoula to Superior and St. Regis.

Baucus said if BPA builds the lines, that would deprive the state and local communities of tax revenues that would be generated if it were Montana Power's project.

"My feeling is that Montana Power found a way of getting around the utility siting act and getting around paying taxes," he said.

Baucus said the state attorney general's office is preparing a suit to try to require that BPA comply with the state act.

"The principle of Bonneville building these lines is bad," Baucus said. "Bonneville will use its tax-exempt status to build lines which will carry power for privately owned utilities."

Spokesman Review 4-9-80