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O'Brien County has been selected as the site for a \$250 million converter station for Clean Line Energy Partners. (Photo by Josh Harrell)

Company picks O'Brien County for \$250 million project

2,000 wind turbines to be erected

Needed for feeding into \$250 million converter

by Dan Breen, Staff Writer

REGIONAL-A company official confirmed Tuesday that Clean Line Energy Partners has selected O'Brien County as the site for a \$250 million converter station to help transport wind energy to Illinois. The decision means N'West Iowa is likely to see a major landscape change over the next several years with as many as 2,000

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wind turbines being constructed within a 100-mile radius of the Rock Island Clean Line converter station.

Clean Line Energy Partners project development manager Cary Kottler said the company still is determining a site but has settled on O'Brien County.

"Hopefully, within the first few months of the year, we'll option a piece of land for the converter station to plant our flag in the ground," Kottler said.

The Houston-based company wants to deliver wind energy power 500 miles from western Iowa to the transmission grid in Morris, IL, where it can provide clean energy to as many as 1.4 million homes. Infrastructure already is in place to deliver the energy from Illinois to the Atlantic Ocean.

Company research has shown that N'West Iowa has some of the best wind resources in the United States.

"As a result of this line, you're going to see a huge increase in wind farm development in the state," Kottler said.

Clean Line Energy Partners, which operates three other transmission lines in the southern United States, expects the project to cost about \$1.7 billion to construct and could have a \$7 billion economic impact through construction jobs, manufacturing jobs and easement payments to landowners.

The company is working with state agencies on an environmental and technical review to determine an optimal route for the line across Iowa. Clean Line Energy then will have to file its route for approval with the Iowa Utilities Board.

O'Brien County Economic Development Corporation has been tied to the project from the beginning.

"They've worked with us really closely," said O'Brien County economic development director Kiana Johnson. "They wanted a lot of land information and land owner contacts. Out of our office, we've launched a supporter campaign to reach out to the community."

She said the project will have a huge economic impact in the region from lower property taxes and construction benefits to permanent jobs and the exchange of goods and services. According to Kottler, an economic impact study on the project would create an estimated 500 permanent jobs and more than 5,000 temporary jobs to construct the wind turbines and converter station.

"It really does affect all areas of economic development," Johnson said.

She said wind energy companies have been knocking on the area's door for at least eight years, but most of them have decided against construction in N'West Iowa because there was no way to move the energy.

"The lack of transmission has prevented anything from happening. That's where Clean Line is going to come in and make those possibilities," Johnson said.

Emily Waund of Sanborn, chairwoman of the O'Brien County Board of Supervisors, said Clean Line has kept in contact with the supervisors, but they have not played a big role in the process yet.

"They've not really approached us. We'll cross that bridge when they get a little further along," Waund said. "We're thrilled to death that they are coming to O'Brien County, or they seem to be, but that's as far as the discussion has gone."

The converter station needs a minimum of 65 acres for the construction, but the company is looking at purchasing a larger piece of land of 80-160 acres.

Kottler recognizes that land prices have risen dramatically in the last year and knows that will factor into both easements and the purchase of land for the converter station. He said land prices are only a minor issues given the scope of the project, however.

For now, primary efforts on Rock Island Clean Line are being concentrated in Illinois. Kottler hopes later in the year the company will be in position to earn approval for its route from the Iowa Utilities Board. That would lead to more active work in Iowa, including the land purchase for the converter station.

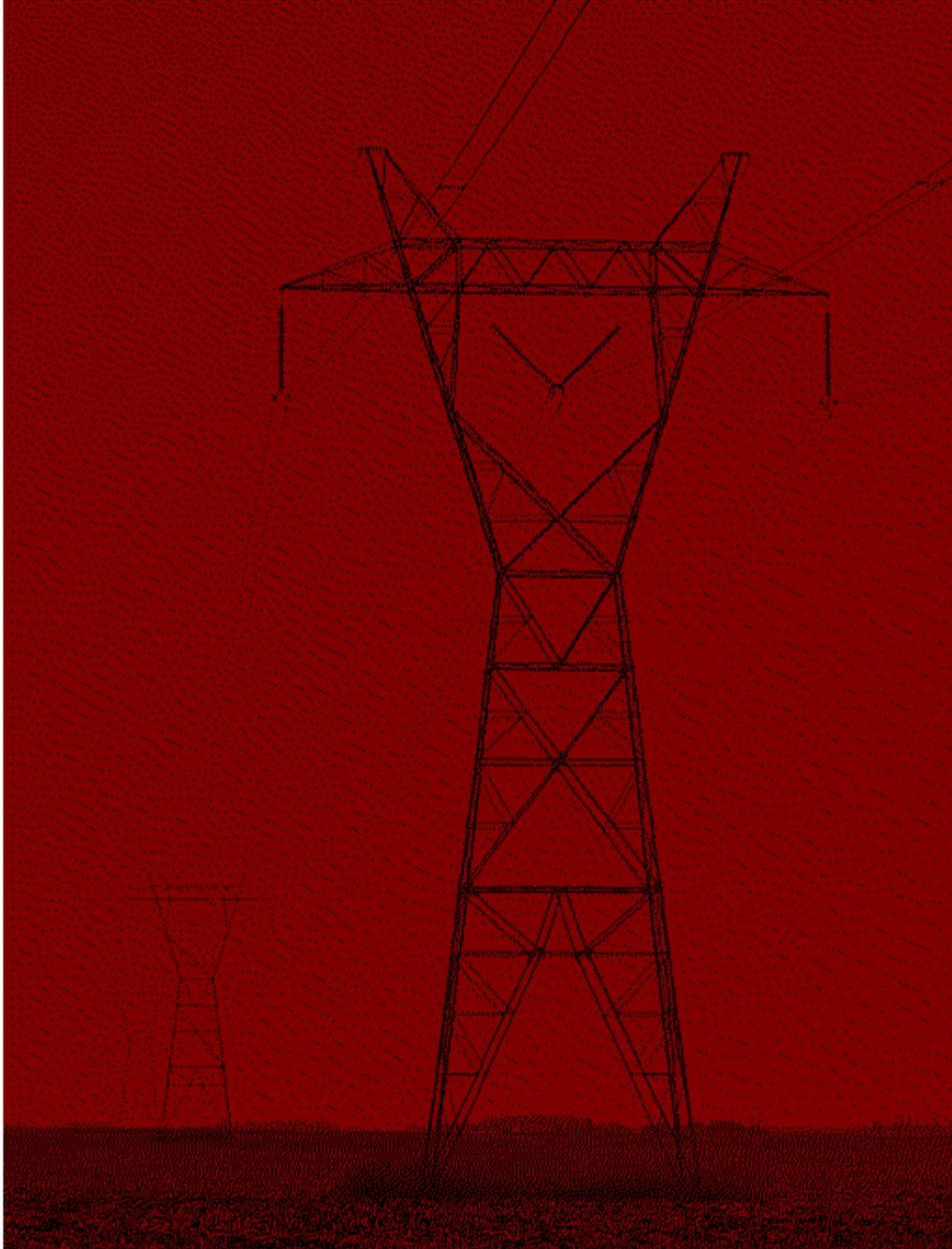
The line would look similar to most major power pole structures with four to six poles every 120-160 feet.

The timetable calls for construction to take place starting in 2014 with potential completion of the project in 2016.

"These projects take a long time to get all the pieces together," Kottler said. "We're learning a lot every day and

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getting a tremendous amount of support from people who want to see the project happen."



Clean Line Energy Partners officials have confirmed that O'Brien County will be home to a \$250 million wind energy converter station. Up to 2,000 wind turbines are expected to be built in the region as a result and linked up to the converter station. (Photo by Josh Harrell)

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