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PUC Docket No. 60319
PUBLIC COMMENT OF MELISSA STRONG

I am writing to strongly oppose any route for the proposed Pine–McCloud 345 kV transmission line that includes **Link 1R through the Hueco Valley near Hueco Tanks State Park and Historic Site**.

Some places deserve additional care because once their character is lost, it cannot be recreated. Hueco Tanks and the surrounding Hueco Valley are such a place.

I have spent many years climbing at Hueco Tanks and operate the Wagon Wheel guiding concession (operating in the Hueco Valley for the past twenty years) providing access to HTSP&HS. I have an enormous appreciation for what makes this place so extraordinary. Hueco Tanks is more than a recreation destination--it is an internationally significant climbing area, an irreplaceable **cultural and historic landscape,** wildlife habitat, and a place whose undeveloped desert setting is inseparable from the experience of visiting it. **The entire Hueco Valley is an archaeological site**—massive transmission towers would not just disrupt the view shed and the flow of the valley, but unearth, precious archaeological resources that should be protected.

A 345 kV transmission corridor with massive towers and a wide right-of-way would permanently change the character of the Hueco Valley. Once this landscape is fragmented by major infrastructure, we cannot simply restore what has been lost. The effects would extend beyond the land directly beneath the transmission line to the viewshed, wildlife habitat, surrounding residents and landowners, recreational experience, and the unique sense of place that draws people to Hueco Tanks from around the world.

This is particularly difficult to justify when alternative routing can accomplish the project's purpose while reducing impacts on private property and avoiding Link 1R.

Operating a guiding concession in HTSP&HS, I can also speak to its importance well beyond El Paso County. Climbers travel here from across the United States and around the world. They stay in the area, hire guides, purchase food and supplies, and support local businesses. Protecting the landscape surrounding Hueco Tanks therefore has cultural, recreational, environmental, and economic value. Ruining the Hueco Valley with powerlines hurts local landowners as well as businesses and the local economy.

Responsible infrastructure planning isn't just *can* we be built this here but *should* we built here when a less destructive alternative exists.

I respectfully ask the Public Utility Commission of Texas to **reject any proposed route containing Link 1R** and select an alternative that meets the region's electrical needs while better protecting residents, private property, the Hueco Valley, and the extraordinary cultural and natural landscape surrounding Hueco Tanks State Park and Historic Site.

Some places deserve additional care because once their character is lost, it cannot be recreated. Hueco Tanks and the surrounding Hueco Valley are such a place.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Melissa Strong
Colorado resident
Rock climber and volunteer guide at Hueco Tanks State Park and Historic Site