

From: Hawk Metheny [<mailto:hmetheny@appalachiantrail.org>]
Sent: Tuesday, November 05, 2013 4:53 PM
To: Mills, Brian
Subject: ATC comments for Northern Pass EIS

Hi Brian

Please find attached supplemental comments from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy for the Northern Pass EIS scoping process. These comments will supplement our June 2011 submission to DOE.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and please let me know if you have questions or need more info.

Hawk Metheny

Hawk Metheny
New England Regional Director
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
158 Sweetwater Drive
White River Junction, VT 05001
Phone: 802.281.5890
Fax: 802.281.5890
Skype: hawk.metheny

hmetheny@appalachiantrail.org
www.appalachiantrail.org



The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail – ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. To become a member, volunteer, or learn more, visit www.appalachiantrail.org.



November 5, 2013

Brian Mills
Senior Planning Advisor
Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability (OE-20)
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585
Brian.Mills@hq.doe.gov

RE: Public Scoping for the second Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Northern Pass Transmission Line in New Hampshire

Dear Mr. Mills:

I am writing on behalf of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) regarding the above-referenced Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed 1200 MW HVDC Northern Pass Transmission Line and the associated potential impacts to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST or A.T.). These comments will supplement the written comments submitted by ATC on June 13, 2011 and oral comments submitted at the DOE public scoping meetings on March 16, 2011 in Lincoln, NH; on March 20, 2011 in Haverhill, NH; and on September 25, 2013 in Whitefield, NH.

Organizational background—ATC is a private, nonprofit, educational organization founded in 1925 (as the Appalachian Trail Conference) to coordinate private-citizen as well as public-agency efforts to design, construct, and maintain the Appalachian Trail and to conserve and manage adjacent lands and resources. ATC has a membership of 43,000 individuals and also is a federation of 31 affiliated hiking and outing clubs throughout the eastern United States, each of which maintains an assigned segment of the Appalachian Trail. From its earliest beginnings, the Appalachian Trail and its associated facilities have been maintained largely by a corps of dedicated volunteers that today numbers more than 6,000 individuals and who last year contributed about 240,000 hours to Trail maintenance, protection, and education.

Mission—The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail—ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come.

Appalachian Trail overview—The Appalachian Trail is a 2,186-mile footpath extending from Maine to Georgia through 14 states, generally along the ridgelines and major valleys of the Appalachian Mountain range. The A.T., as it is generally known, connects six National Parks, eight National Forests, including the White Mountain National Forest, and more than 60 state parks, forests, and game-management units. The Trail received Federal recognition in 1968 under the National Trails System Act as the nation's first National Scenic Trail. Congress mandated through that act that the Appalachian National Scenic Trail would be administered by the Secretary of Interior in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture. As an outgrowth of amendments to the act in 1978, and notwithstanding its checkerboard pattern of land ownership and administration, the Trail is now identified as a unit of the National Park System and is administered by the A.T. Park Office and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in separate offices in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. ATC has formal agreements with the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and numerous state agencies in the management of the A.T. Over two million annual visitors hike or backpack on the A.T.

Scoping comments—ATC’s comments submitted in June 2011 primarily focused on the physical impacts the proposed project would have on the natural, scenic, and recreational resources associated with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. While all of those concerns remain valid and should be thoroughly analyzed in a comprehensive and programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, these comments will primarily focus on the question of public benefit and societal need for the proposed project.

EIS analysis of overriding public need—The 2005 White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan designated a specific Management Area for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (MA 8.3), which encompasses the lands one-half mile either side of the Trail for a total of one mile in width. With that designation comes a set of standards and guidelines. On p. 3–48 of the Forest Plan, the language under Lands and Special Uses for MA 8.3 list Standard 3 (S-3) states: **“New utility lines or rights-of-way are prohibited unless they represent the only feasible and prudent alternative to meet an overriding public need.”**

Nearly identical language appears in ATC’s **Policy on Roads and Utility Developments** as the first of five criteria used to determine if ATC will oppose a proposed transmission line project or not. All five criteria were listed in ATC’s June 2011 scoping comments to DOE.

Since ATC last submitted written comments on this project in 2011, we have learned that DOE has categorized this proposal as a participant-funded, for-profit merchant project and that the developer has regularly stated that the project is not necessary to meet current market demand or system reliability.

While ATC recognizes that there may be some limited societal and environmental benefits to large scale hydro-power versus more carbon intensive methods for producing electricity, imported hydro-electric does not currently meet the state of New Hampshire’s Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards. Therefore we believe that it is imperative that the DOE, WMNF, SE group, and all others involved with the EIS for this project, including ATC, should very carefully analyze and interpret the language in the Forest Plan and attempt to clarify and if possible reconcile what appear to be conflicting statements about what precisely is an “overriding public need.”

Alternatives—While ATC recognizes that there is benefit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from power generation, we are requesting that the EIS determine if the same level of carbon reduction can be achieved through a combination of demand-side conservation and efficiency, along with generation through biomass, solar, appropriately sited community-scale wind-energy facilities, and other methods.

If it is determined that there is indeed an overriding public need for 1200 MW of imported hydro-electric power into the ISO-New England grid, then we request that the EIS thoroughly analyze all other possible less-intrusive alternatives to crossing the WMNF and ANST at the proposed remote location in the Kinsman Range near the Easton and Lincoln town line. We believe it is inappropriate to compromise and degrade an outstanding publicly owned resource, in this case the ANST and the WMNF, for the sole reason of transmitting electricity.

While the developer has proposed coaligning the 1200 MW DC line with an existing PSNH 115 kV AC line, it is important to note that the existing AC line was constructed when the land it sits on was privately owned. The WMNF acquired that large parcel (known as the Bog Pond tract) in the 1970s with the AC line already on it.

Further, while since 1948 PSNH holds a 225-foot-wide easement within a portion of ANST MA 8.3, this easement is only valid for the portion of MA 8.3 located in the town of Lincoln, NH. Since the ANST MA extends for one-half mile either side of the actual A.T. treadway, it also reaches across the town line into the town of Easton, NH, where PSNH does not have an easement but instead operates the existing line within a 150-foot ROW. This delineation is clearly depicted on the Proposed Route map (Exhibit 1) submitted in Northern Pass Transmission’s Special Use Permit Application Amendment Exhibits dated September 5, 2013.

Alternative Crossings—The WMNF and the ANST are publicly owned resources and are protected for their outstanding natural, scenic, and recreational resources. ATC believes that other crossing locations have not yet been thoroughly analyzed and should be.

The American people, through the authority of NPS and USFS, have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in securing a protected land base for the 2,186-mile Trail, and ATC is concerned about the continued compromise of this highly regarded public resource for what may not be **“the only feasible and prudent alternative to meet an overriding public need.”**

Current Status—The ATC’s New England Regional Office has been actively engaged in the public process for this project and has been working closely with the White Mountain National Forest and EIS Group on the analysis of the impacts the proposed project would have on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. We will continue to do so and will be monitoring developments related to this project, and we appreciate being kept informed of any new changes in the EIS process. Also, please contact our office if any questions or clarifications arise that are related to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the EIS process.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hawk Metheny". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hawk Metheny
New England Regional Director
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