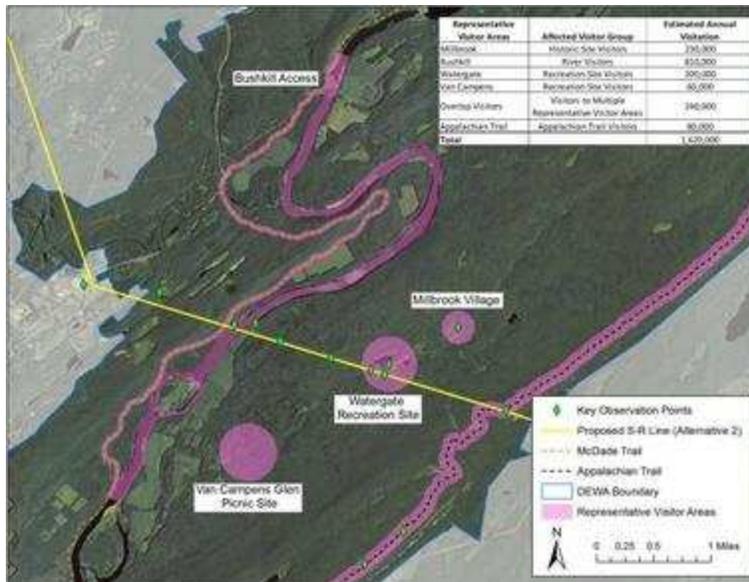


Susquehanna-Roseland power line gets final OK from National Park Service, utility says

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This National Park Service map shows the route of the Susquehanna-Roseland power line and federal park land impacted by the project. The line is slated to be energized in 2015, linking the Berwick, Pa., area to switching stations in Roseland, Essex County, N.J.

The proposed 500-kilovolt power line through Pennsylvania and New Jersey has gained its final regulatory approval and is on pace for activation in 2015, despite continued opposition by environmentalists.

The National Park Service on Monday granted final approval for the [Susquehanna-Roseland line](#) to be built through the federally owned Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Appalachian Trail and Middle Delaware National Scenic River.

[Public Service Electric and Gas Co.](#) and [PPL Electric Utilities](#) have said Montgomery County, Pa.-based PJM Interconnection ordered the new line to prevent overloads on existing power lines.

The Pennsylvania and New Jersey utility regulatory agencies already OK'd the \$1.2-billion, 146-mile project linking power sources in the Berwick, Pa., area to switching stations in Roseland, Essex County, N.J., serving millions of people in the Northeast.

"This new line will reinforce our nation's critical energy infrastructure for future generations," Ralph LaRossa, president and chief operating officer of PSE&G, and

Gregory N. Dudkin, president of PPL Electric Utilities, said in a joint statement. "It will ensure that homes and businesses in a multi-state region continue to enjoy safe and reliable electric service long into the future."

Nearly three-year review

The park service's record of decision brings to a close the federal review begun in November 2009. The analysis [quantified the project's effect on human use and ecological losses in the federal park lands at \\$89 million](#) throughout the transmission lines' estimated life span of 60 years.

Allentown-based PPL Electric Utilities and PSE&G, of Newark, say they will contribute to a fund of at least \$56 million administered by a nonprofit group to purchase or preserve land for public use, compensate for wetlands impacts and fund cultural and historic preservation activities.

The approved route follows the path of existing lower-voltage power lines 95 percent of the way, according to the U.S. Department of the Interior. The route crosses northern Hardwick Township in Warren County.

Construction has already begun. Work on the 4.5-mile stretch within the federal park boundaries -- tower erection and stringing of the conductors -- is expected to commence in the winter, following the issuance of park service permits, and last about six months. The line is slated to be energized by 2015.

The project will create about 2,000 jobs during its 2 1/2-year construction period, the utilities say.

Federally fast-tracked

President Barack Obama's [administration selected the Susquehanna-Roseland line in October 2011 for fast-track permitting](#) as part of efforts to modernize the power grid, PPL Electric Utilities and PSE&G said.

"By moving forward with this critical upgrade of our power grid, we are getting Americans back to work modernizing our nation's infrastructure, all while ensuring our treasured national parks are protected," U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said in a statement.

"This project brings the nation's electric system one step closer to a modern, 21st century grid that is safer and more secure and gives consumers more energy choices," Salazar stated. "I'm pleased the companies have committed to significant mitigation work and look forward to making additional announcements about that in the coming weeks."

The New Jersey Sierra Club referred to the \$56 million fund as "blood money that will not mitigate the impacts of the power line" through the parks but rather pave the way for increased profits off electricity sales.

Club Director Jeff Tittel also said the project will expand the market for "dirty coal-fired energy" while destroying publicly owned scenic vistas and natural resources. PPL Electric Utilities notes that the utilities need additional right-of-way and clearing within the park boundaries on less than a mile in Pennsylvania; elsewhere, existing easements are wider than the 200 feet needed. Towers will rise as high as 190 feet.

The project is still subject to a appeal filed by [the Sierra Club chapter before the New Jersey Supreme Court](#), challenging the state Board of Public Utilities' approval of the project. The club plans to challenge the National Park Service decision as well.

"We will be going to court to challenge this give-away of our precious open spaces," Tittel said in a statement today. "We are already preparing our legal challenge. We have been expecting this since the administration fast-tracked the project; we knew the NPS would sell out our national parks."