

Press Release

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Groups Ask DEP to Carefully Review Power Line Expansion Project through Critical Water Supply Area PSE&G is seeking a Highlands Act exemption for the Susquehanna-Roseland power line expansion project cutting through the heart of New Jersey's Highlands Region

Environmental and municipal representatives gathered today at Splitrock Reservoir, in the heart of New Jersey's Highlands Region, overlooking lattice power line towers nearly 80 feet tall that may soon be replaced with 180-200 foot tall monopoles as part of PSE&G's proposed Susquehanna-Roseland power line expansion project. The groups represented a broad range of constituencies with a similar message: a project of this scope and size must meet the natural and scenic resource requirements of the 2004 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act.

PSE&G has applied for a Highlands Act exemption, known as a Highlands Applicability Determination (HAD) application. The application was noticed in the NJDEP bulletin on November 5, 2008. The public currently has until December 4, 2008 to comment on the HAD application.

"PSE&G's current proposal, calling for nearly 200 foot towers cutting through the most environmentally sensitive lands in the Highlands, is grossly inconsistent with the mandatory resource protection elements of the Highlands Act, set forth to ensure the future integrity of the Region and sustainable water supplies for more than half of New Jersey's residents," **stated Mark Zakutansky of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.**

"In Byram, construction work for this project poses a threat to environmentally sensitive lands – steep slopes adjacent to Lake Mohawk, groundwater recharge areas and threatened and endangered species habitat," **stated Scott Olson, a Byram Township councilman.** "To ensure no harm is done to these resources, this project must be put through a necessary and thorough scrutiny and review by the Highlands Council."

The Highlands Act exempts 17 types of activities from strict Preservation Area rules: certain projects with prior approvals, construction of a single family dwelling on an existing lot, etc. PSE&G's proposed power line expansion is the first project of this scope and magnitude to come before the DEP for such an exemption. It is also the first project of this nature requiring the DEP to determine if it is "*consistent with the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act.*"

Highlands Act Exemption (#11) states: "*The routine maintenance and operations, rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, repair, or upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility, provided that the activity is consistent with the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act;*"

"PSE&G is looking to increase the height of their transmission towers by over 200% yet they want us all to think that their work is merely a routine up-grade and should be given an exemption under the Highlands Act?" **said Fred Stine, Citizen Action Coordinator for the Delaware Riverkeeper Network.** "You'll be able to see these monstrosities from almost anywhere in one of the last unspoiled areas in New Jersey."

Because of the considerable impacts that construction of these 180-200 foot tall towers may have on the landscape and scenic integrity of the Region, representatives called on the DEP to ask the Highlands Council to conduct a consistency review of PSE&G's Highlands Applicability Determination (HAD) application to ensure that the project is consistent with the Highlands Act and will not threaten the resources that the Legislature set forth for protection.

“This power line will cut an ugly scar through the Highlands destroying wetlands, harming our environment and promoting development in the Region,” **stated Jeff Tittel Director NJ Sierra Club** “The Highlands Council, the DEP and the BPU must do their job by using oversight and strictly enforcing laws and regulations to stop this horrible project.”

Notably, the proposal from PSE&G is inconsistent with the following goals and purposes of the Highlands Act:

- **In the Preservation Area, which the line cuts through, the Act states that the one of the many goals of the regional master plan is to “(3) protect the natural, scenic, and other resources of the Highlands Region, including but not limited to contiguous forests, wetlands, vegetated stream corridors, steep slopes, and critical habitat for fauna and flora;”**
 - 180-200 foot tall towers will have considerable impacts during construction, which will require creation of new access roads across previously undeveloped lands in core forests, prime groundwater recharge areas, in critical habitat areas and along steep slopes.
 - Existing towers that currently sit at or below the current height of the tree canopy will be replaced with towers more than double in height, directly impacting the scenic integrity of the Region, mandated to be protected by the Highlands Act.
- **“(5) preserve outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, on publicly owned land;”**
 - The power lines will cross many regional and nationally significant recreational areas including the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, the Appalachian Trail, the Highlands Trail and numerous state, county, local and nonprofit open space lands which were purchased with public funds for their environmental and recreational resources. Recreational users of these lands will be impacted during the construction process. The new towers will be visible from a far greater viewshed, impacting the recreational values of these public lands.
- **“(9) prohibit or limit to the maximum extent possible construction or development which is incompatible with preservation of this unique area.”**
 - Power line towers of this size and magnitude are not consistent with the preservation of the Highlands Region and its unique character.

“The Highlands Act was adopted to protect the region's water quality and sensitive lands. The NJDEP should enforce the law and reject PSE&G's request to skirt around the protections of the Act,” **said Dena Mottola Jaborska, Executive Director, Environment New Jersey.**

“PSE&G's proposed expansion project has considerable implications for the critical environmental and scenic resources of the Highlands Region, such as endangered species habitat, wetlands, ground water recharge, and the scenic integrity of the area. The Highlands Act is landmark legislation for this critical water supply region and the public must be reassured that PSE&G's proposal will not undermine these necessary resource protections.” **Mark Zakutansky, Campaign and Grassroots Coordinator of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition explained,** “The Highlands Council should help the DEP review this application to ensure that this proposal is not in violation of any terms of the Highlands Act.”

Dave Slaperud of Stop the Lines, a citizen-based group representing hundreds of affected landowners along the line, added, “Adding a 500Kv line to the existing 230Kv line is unnecessary, excessive, and a threat to the natural resources on fragile protected lands along the “chosen route” in the NJ Highlands. This project is a huge and very real threat to our environment that would include drilling and blasting. The idea of de-construction of existing towers and construction of nearly 200' monstrous towers through some of the most beautiful areas in New Jersey is an assault on our residents and the environment. Faced with a slowing demand for more energy (~1% per year), we certainly do not need a 700% increase in transmission capacity through the state.”

On November 6, 2008, PSE&G announced that they plan to file a formal application with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) before the end of the year. The BPU will have the opportunity to review the project and ensure that it is necessary for reliability and is appropriate considering the wide range of investments New Jersey is planning in terms of renewable energy sources as outlined in the New Jersey Energy Master Plan.

Splitrock Reservoir is surrounded by over 1,500 acres of preserved land acquired as both watershed lands through the NJDEP and with the assistance of non-profit organizations like the Trust for Public Land. The reservoir has a capacity of 3.3 billion gallons of water. The surrounding lands have been open to the public since 2003 and now serve a growing cohort of anglers, paddlers, hikers, wildlife watchers, mountain bikers, boy scouts and girl scouts, hunters, and picnickers. White-tailed deer, black bear and wild turkey are all prevalent in the area, as well as raptors, waterfowl and neotropical birds during the spring and fall migrations. Bald eagle sightings are also very common around the lake.

The NJ Highlands Coalition is made up of a diverse and effective group of organizations and individuals; small and large, local, regional, statewide and national; all working together to protect, enhance and restore the NJ Highlands

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