



Last stand: Critics slam power line plans across Delaware Water Gap, Appalachian Trail

By MEGHAN VAN DYK • STAFF WRITER •
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JEFFERSON — Opponents of the planned Susquehanna-Roseland power line upgrades decried the environmental and visual impacts the project would have on one of the northeast's best-known scenic landscapes, the Delaware Water Gap, at a hearing hosted by the National Park Service on Wednesday night.

"Cutting through a national park and a wild and scenic river completely goes against the purpose of the park," said Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. "It's a desecration, bringing big and ugly power to the most-used recreational resource in the country."

Public Service Electric & Gas and PPL Electric -- a Pennsylvania utility company — have proposed adding 500-kilovolt lines on towers as tall as 195 feet along an existing 146-mile route through both states, including parts of Morris County. Although the project, which could cost as much as \$1.3 billion, received approvals by the respective state utility authorities based on projected power needs, it still requires the National Park Service's endorsement.

The agency will conduct an environmental impact study of resource concerns and decide by 2012 whether to grant permits to the utility companies because the line runs through the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, the Middle Delaware River Wild and Scenic River and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

More than 100 people packed a meeting hall at Camp Jefferson for the second of three public hearings, which will help determine the scope of the Park Service's study. The first hearing was held Tuesday in Pennsylvania and the final is tonight at the Sheraton Parsippany Hotel in Parsippany from 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Dave Slaperud, founder of Stop the Lines, a grassroots group that opposed the project at New Jersey Board of Public Utilities hearings, believes PSE&G and PJM failed to prove the need for the project by refusing to further study electricity needs in the region.

"We don't need this line and we don't want it in the park," Slaperud said. "It is not a foregone conclusion, and you have the ability to look at energy efficiency and conservation impacts."

Kevin Siqveland, of the Delaware Riverkeeper, asked the Park Service to consider the water quality impacts downstream along the Delaware River.

"This is a New Jersey watershed issue, but it involves many more communities other than those through which the line would pass," Siqveland said. "It would reduce water quality in a region where the quality is, at best, horrific."

Many residents, including Dan Moore, 51, of Jefferson, asked the Park Service to reject the plan simply to preserve the viewscape of the Delaware