



Photo by Daniel Free/New Jersey Herald
Kate Millsaps, of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, speaks during a Save the Park rally/walk at the Watergate Recreation Area near Millbrook Village Saturday.

Public gathers to protest power line project

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HARDWICK — The hills that line the Delaware River in western Sussex and Warren counties are fraught with pristine waters, wildlife and majestic views that rise along Old Mine Road, one of the oldest routes in America.

“These vistas are going to be gone if the federal park allows this to go through,” said Laura Dempsey, chair of Save the Park, a group that is combating a power-line project that has riled up homeowners and park lovers alike as it obtains permits to begin work as soon as this summer.

More than 60 people gathered Saturday in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area to protest the 500-kilowatt Susquehanna-Roseland power line proposed by PSE&G. The line has gained approvals from the Highlands Council, the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, but protesters hope to win the “final fight” before the National Park Service.

Speakers at the rally conducted in and around Millbrook Village said the power line would ruin the aesthetics and ecosystem of the Water Gap region. It would also take away tourism dollars from historic homes and villages along Old Mine Road, which 17th-century Dutch settlers first used to bring copper ore from Pahaquarry (now in Hardwick, Warren County) to Kingston, N.Y., they said.

“I just cannot see it,” said Dempsey, of Hardwick. “There’s no way this can happen.”

PSE&G hopes to gain the permits it needs and begin work on the eastern half of the New Jersey line sometime this summer. The company argues the region will face brownouts as early as 2012 if the approximately \$1 billion upgrade is not built.

“I find that argument absolutely untenable,” said Grace Sica, of the Sierra Club. “I’m not willing to sacrifice my environment, my vistas, my history and my culture for that.”

Protesters of the line said electrical efficiency should replace consumption and profits as the focus of the region.

The route runs 145 miles from Pennsylvania across northwestern New Jersey along an existing right-of-way, but significantly multiplies the height and power of the 1920s-era transmission lines.

Kate Millsaps, a campaign coordinator with the Highlands Coalition, said construction on the lines would trigger a ripple effect against the ecosystem. It would separate the forests and compact sediment, heating streams and eating up oxygen where trout live.

“This is one of our primary issues,” Millsaps said. “We’re going to get the (park service) to say no.”

Tom Hill, co-founder of Stop the Lines, said more and more of his Fredon neighbors are recognizing the deleterious impact of the power line proposal.

“A voice is never too late,” Hill said. “Keep speaking, keep speaking now.”

Cheryl and David Santini, of Phillipsburg, attended the rally as their first foray into the power lines debate. They had heard about the project and are concerned about the aesthetic damage it may do to the unspoiled Delaware Water Gap region.

“I love the beauty of it,” Cheryl Santini said of the park. “I feel like I’m in a whole different world.”

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