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## Susquehanna-Roseland Power Plan Power line plan in limbo as feds enter the fray

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**WASHINGTON TWP.** - Just when the dust appeared to settle on the controversial Susquehanna-Roseland Power Transmission Line upgrade, the National Park Service (NPS) has suggested a different route.

On Tuesday, Sept. 14, the public comment period on the park service alternatives ended, but no final decision is expected from the service until late 2012.

Two of the NPS alternate routes for the \$750 million Roseland power line project would run through western Morris County, using utility existing rights-of-way in Washington and Chester townships.

Another of the alternatives would erect towers along Route 80 from near the Pennsylvania border to the Roseland area, passing through Mount Olive, Roxbury and Mount Arlington.

NPS spokeswoman Deborah Nordeen said 1,186 pieces of comment on the NPS plans have been received as of Tuesday.

The suggested alternatives are part of a now-cloudy future for the Susquehanna-Roseland project that is designed to add 500 kilovolts of capacity to a line that now carries 230 kilovolts.

On Monday, Sept. 13, Public Service Electric and Gas (PSE&G), and its Pennsylvania counterpart, PPL Electric Utilities, reiterated their support for the route already approved by the state Board of Public Utilities (BPU) on Feb. 11, 2010.

The approved route will have a much wider right-of-way and 195 foot tall transmission towers. It follows the current route of the smaller line, directly through the Delaware Gap National Recreation Area, then east. It does not cross any municipalities in western Morris County.

Many groups who had vocally opposed the new 750 kilovolt expansion were expected to have abandoned their fight after the BPU decision was upheld by the N.J. Highlands Council, which acted in an advisory capacity.

However, public hearings by the NPS in August has rekindled opposition to the project.

By law, the park service has to sign off on work permits on any construction in the park area. An

environmental impact statement (EIS) is also required, which isn't expected to be ready for comment until next year.

The final EIS may not be readied until 2014, according to the park service. That leaves the upgraded line in limbo.

PSE&G and PPL used the comment period to file their own position with the park service, saying that the already approved route is the most reasonable path for "this critical improvement" in the region's electric infrastructure.

The companies said choosing another route would increase costs, have more impact on people and the environment and contain "critical flaws."

One additional option was proposed, which seemed to counter previous PSE&G positions. The utility said Monday that it could build the higher towers through the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area without having to widen the right-of-way.

According to the NPS, that prospective doesn't appear likely. The park service said the 4.18 miles of right-of-way through the recreation area is overgrown and neglected and would require extensive preparation before higher towers could be built.

According to the utilities, if the higher power transmission facilities aren't built, power outages in the northeast grid could be experienced as early as 2012.

That assessment, however, runs smack into the admission by PSE&G in late July that it could probably not get the lines built until at least 2014. The utility cited environmental approvals and the delay in obtaining them as reasons for delay.

According to a decision by the Board of Public Utilities, PSE&G's flood hazard permit for the project is incomplete and its freshwater wetlands permit has not been approved.

Among the alternate routes proposed by NPS, the two which cross Washington Township and then head east are the shortest. The NPS said that should result in savings that could be passed to customers, who are expected to bear the cost of the project through higher rates.

Alternate routes six and seven take the same path through western Morris County. Because of different routing in Pennsylvania, one would be 114 miles long, the other 121 miles, with no mileage in the recreation area.

The Interstate 80 corridor route would be the shortest, covering just 110 miles and one mile in the NRA. By contrast, the approved route along the existing line is 147 miles long.

One of the options the park service has left itself is to refuse any permits for the project as approved currently.

Among the opponents of the transmission line is the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference.

**Another staunch opponent is the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, which represents a wide variety of environmental groups.**

**“We are strongly for the no action alternative,” said Kate Millsap, coordinator for the organization. “We don’t think the line is necessary at all.”**

**The coalition’s executive director Julia Somers, said the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will honor a request from the NPS to withhold final approval until the park service process is complete.**

**In the interim, PSE&G has requested permission to build the easternmost portion of the project between Roseland and the Hopatcong switching station.**

**“The applicant has not been approved to do half the project,” said Somers. “They will need to obtain a new permit application.”**

**Somers said that only three of the six alternative routes proposed by the park service would hook up to the Hopatcong substation.**

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