

Power Line Crossings Proposed
Along the Appalachian Trail

Issue: Designation of three National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors (NIETC; see NPS map). Now proposed in ATC's Mid-Atlantic Region:

- 500 kV Meadow Brook-Loudoun line proposed by Allegheny/Dominion in northern Virginia
- 765 kV line proposed by American Electric Power (AEP) in Maryland
- Unknown line proposed near Delaware Water Gap

Background: Before adoption of the Federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPACT), routing of power lines was regulated by states. Indeed, ATC and the Roanoke A.T. Club worked with the Forest Service and National Park Service between 1990 and 2002 in a major initiative to eliminate approximately a dozen crossings of the Appalachian Trail proposed by APCO (later renamed AEP) on the Jefferson National Forest. That dispute before Virginia's State Corporation Commission was settled after protracted negotiations with the selected route being moved to Jackson's Ferry and the power line routed along I-77. That conflict led to refinement of ATC's "Policy on Roads and Utility Developments" (Chapter 4-G, *Local Management Planning Guide*, attached).

Following adoption of the 2005 EPACT, the Department of Energy (DOE) prepared a "National Interest Electric Transmission Congestion Study" due every three years under EPACT. ATC commented on that study on October 10, 2006. Unbeknown to many, a provision in that Act (Section 1221) gave the federal government eminent domain authority in the event that state or local public utility commissions fail to designate locations for a proposed NIET Corridor within one year.

Current Situation: ATC policy 4-G seeks to minimize the visual and audible impacts of utility corridors, as well as the physical impacts of such corridors to afford the highest level of protection for the footpath, associated resources, and the experience of trail visitors. ATC will oppose construction of any new utility or transmission corridor lines along or across the Appalachian Trail, unless it can be demonstrated that: (1) the proposed project is of overriding public benefit; (2) locating the proposed project along or across the A.T. is the only feasible and prudent alternative; (3) new impacts can be isolated to the area of a single crossing; and (4) adverse impacts to the scenic, historic, cultural, and natural resources of Appalachian Trail corridor lands will be adequately mitigated.

With regard to adequate mitigation, the Conservancy believes that a "no-net-loss" approach should be established as the minimum threshold for approval of any utility line that crosses the Appalachian Trail. In other words, if it is determined that it is in the public interest for a utility line to cross the A.T., then sufficient mitigation must be incorporated into the proposed project so that there is no net loss of trail values or conservation qualities significant to the trail experience and local trail communities. Such values include the sense of remoteness and connection to the primeval environment

of the Appalachian Mountains that the trail typically provides, but also includes the pastoral, agricultural, historical and other aspects so important to Appalachian Trail culture, history and local economies.

Dominion Power Line: Last September, consultants for the joint Allegheny/Dominion power line approached ATC and ATPO staff, were given a copy of ATC's policy, and subsequently developed several proposed routes in northern Virginia, setting off a firestorm of controversy (see <http://www.pecva.org/landuse/energy/powerlines/index.php>). Depending on the ultimate conclusion of this issue, Allegheny-Dominion appears that it may for the most part meet the location requirements of ATC policy 4-G.

Maryland Power Line: AEP and NPS hosted a recent meeting to discuss the company's proposal for the 765 kV power line from West Virginia to New Jersey. Numerous historic and battlefield parks attended. It appears that it will cross the ANST with a single crossing between Washington Monument State park and Fox Gap in Maryland; however, we're not sure at this writing.

Pennsylvania Power Line: We are unsure about the status of the Delaware River Corridor.

Due to significant constituent pressure in northern Virginia orchestrated in part by the Piedmont Environmental Council, Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA) has introduced a bill before the 110th Congress (HR 829, attached). Both Wolf and the PEC have asked ATC to support this bill (CK)

Actions Proposed: (1) Continue close monitoring of proposed power line crossings and related policies and legislative changes. (2) Engage clubs and neighboring stakeholders and interest groups in detailed mitigation planning for specific crossings. (3) Consider effects of power lines in context of other energy development, air pollution and climate change.