



Partnership for the National Trails System

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PARTNERSHIP FOR THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM POLICY ON GAS, ELECTRIC, AND OTHER LINEAR TRANSMISSION FACILITIES

Natural gas pipelines, coal slurry pipelines, telephone and cable trunk lines, irrigation canals, and particularly electric transmission powerlines have the potential to dramatically affect National Scenic and National Historic Trails.

These facilities provide important public services – the natural gas, electric power, water resources, or communications services delivered through these facilities provide what most consider essential needs for modern living. Congress also provided for these uses to be authorized when necessary. The National Trail System Act provides that “(o)ther uses along the trail, which will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trail, may be permitted by the Secretary charged with administration of the trail.”

However, these projects also come at a cost. The visual and sometimes audible impacts associated with these linear transmission facilities can have a significant effect on visitors’ experiences on National Scenic and National Historic Trails, and in some instances, destroy the very values that Congress intended to preserve when these Trails were designated.

Adverse impacts can include access roads, cleared swaths of land, chain-link fences, lights, borrow pits, chemical treatments for control of vegetation, access by off-road vehicles, and invasive species. Perhaps most evident of all, overhead powerlines can change entire viewscapes, rendering a spectacular backcountry landscape or historic site marred by huge towers overhead or nearby.

The effects of these types of facilities cannot be overestimated. More than 100 major utility line crossings and more than 600 smaller utility line crossings affect the 2,175-mile Appalachian National Scenic Trail – in effect, one crossing for every three-and-one-half miles of Trail. More projects are on their way, too: at least a dozen proposed projects are currently being reviewed by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and its management partners. Other National Scenic and Historic Trails have had similar histories.

The number of linear transmission projects that intersect National Scenic and National Historic Trails will continue to grow. If left unchecked, the cumulative impacts of these projects also will continue to increase over time, diminishing the natural, cultural, scenic and recreational values of the National Scenic and National Historic Trails.

Policy

The purpose of this policy is not to prohibit linear transmission facilities from crossing National Scenic and National Historic Trails, but to limit new crossings for these types of facilities to those that are absolutely necessary and to mitigate the adverse effects of these necessary crossings to the greatest extent possible. The Partnership for the National Trails System will seek to preserve, protect, and promote the enjoyment of National Scenic and National Historic Trails in such a way that the natural, cultural,

historic, scenic, and recreational resources of these Trails are not adversely affected by linear transmission facilities. To this end, the Partnership hereby adopts the following policy:

Linear transmission facilities, by their nature, are incompatible with the purposes and nature of National Scenic and National Historic Trails. The Partnership will encourage Federal, state, and local agency authorities to adequately analyze the site-specific *and* cumulative impacts of any proposal for a linear transmission facility, seek opportunities for co-location of facilities at crossings of National Scenic and National Historic Trails, and require adequate mitigation for all impacts to Trail values. The Partnership will concur with, and not oppose, a proposal for a linear transmission facility *only* if:

- 1) a linear transmission project has been determined to be in the public interest, as a result of a thorough public process that results in a determination that the project is needed and that the proposed project is an environmentally acceptable method for meeting that need;
- 2) a determination has been made that the only feasible route or routes must cross the route of a National Scenic or National Historic Trail, or an auto tour route for a National Historic Trail;
- 3) a thorough environmental analysis of the project has been completed, including visual impact analysis and “seen area mapping,” and the impacts to natural, cultural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources have been accurately documented and disclosed;
- 4) the linear route of the project will cross the route of a National Scenic or National Historic Trail once, and only once; any such crossing should be located where (a) the important natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational values of that National Scenic or National Historic Trail will not be adversely affected, and (b) the proposed project can be co-located with other linear transmission projects; and
- 5) the adverse impacts of the proposed project can and will be adequately mitigated, through a combination of mitigating measures that will achieve a result of “no net loss” of the National Scenic or National Historic Trail’s natural, cultural, historic scenic, and recreational values.

The following special resource areas, at least to the extent that they are situated within the foreground or middleground view of a national scenic or historic trail, should be considered as exclusion zones, where linear transmission facilities are not permitted:

- wilderness areas, potential wilderness areas, and recommended wilderness areas;
- historic sites and key interpretive sites, particularly along National Historic Trails;
- “High Potential Sites and Segments” of National Historic Trails;
- Forest Service inventoried roadless areas;
- Forest Service primitive and semi-primitive areas; Bureau of Land Management non-motorized areas; and National Park Service natural areas;
- Natural heritage sites, and appropriate buffer zones;
- Designated National Wild, Scenic, and Recreation River corridors;
- Public-use areas, including waysides, campsites, shelters, picnic areas, and overlooks
- Unique habitats and ecological communities, including, but not limited to, alpine zones, wetlands, tidal zones, riparian areas, prairies, and savannahs; and
- Any other special area where significant Trail values, such as a sense of remoteness, would be compromised.

Alternatively, the Partnership supports the identification of zones where linear transmission facilities *should* be located, provided no other prudent and feasible alternatives exist and mitigation sufficient to achieve a “no net loss” condition has been included in the project design. The logical place for such a

zone, in many (but not all) cases, is adjacent to an existing linear transmission facility, highway, or access road, or in an area that has already been developed.

Adopted November 2, 2013

