



HB1270 - Natural Resources - Wildland Areas - Overhead Transmission Lines

Hearing Date: Wednesday, March 6, 2025

Position: OPPOSE

Dear Chair Wilson and members of the Economic Matters Committee:

Waterkeepers Chesapeake respectfully requests an UNFAVORABLE report on HB1270 that would allow the construction of transmission lines through three Tier 1 Wildlands in Western Maryland. Wildlands are incredibly important ecosystems that require protections into perpetuity. This bill undermines the foundation of Maryland's Protected Lands system and creates a new pathway for unpermitted activities in wildlands. Wildlands are exceptional lands and make up a tiny fraction of the acreage of the conserved land in Maryland, (Maryland Wildlands total 65,956 acres across 14 Counties. This is 13% of Maryland Department of Natural Resource's managed lands and less than 1% of Maryland's overall land.)

ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

This bill is counter to the intent of the Wildlands Preservation statute to preserve these sensitive habitats unimpaired for future generations. Western Maryland's economy is based on nature and outdoor tourism. Wildlands provide a primitive recreational experience in pristine settings for hiking, fishing and hunting. These Wildlands protect headwater streams in the Savage River for drinking water, fisheries, and Potomac River water quality. The aesthetics of natural, wild places add to the quality of life and desirability for living and visiting Western Maryland. Wildlands protect sensitive habitats and species found in few other places. Ecosystem fragmentation caused by transmission lines result in irreparable damage and allow invasive species to dominate the landscape. Despite a declaration that the transmission line(s) would be parallel to the existing legal powerlines, there are no specific locations or dimensions provided, which means the danger of fragmentation is very high. Lastly, as wildfires in California and closer to home have shown, transmission lines are a leading cause of wildfires due to the increasing frequency of high winds.

UNDERMINES THE LAW AND PROCESS

The bill creates a new pathway for any delegate to submit bills for changes to wildland management. The bill asks the General Assembly to cede their right of review to the Public Service Commission in their Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity process. Under Maryland Wildlands regulations, only the Governor can request exceptions and change

boundaries, and only after a public need is identified and after public notification and hearings. The private company supporting this legislation has yet to avail themselves of this important state process.

Despite what you will hear from industry, this transmission line(s) is not serving Maryland's hospitals, schools or other needs. The transmission line(s) would supply 500kV of power to Northern Virginia, primarily for data centers. The sources of energy for the transmission line(s) are dirty fossil fuels (coal and gas) power plants in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

NO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Despite what you will hear from the bill sponsors and industry, there were no public disclosure, meetings, or listening sessions preceding the bill's introduction to the legislative committees in the House and Senate.

HB1270 would benefit only one company, NextEra Energy, and one industry, data centers in Northern Virginia, and would devastate pristine wildlands and a local economy. HB1270 would set a dangerous precedent for future destruction of Maryland's other wildlands. Maryland does not need this transmission line. Waterkeepers Chesapeake strongly urges an unfavorable report on HB1270.

Sincerely,
Robin Broder, Acting Executive Director
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
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