

HB1270 Natural Resources - Wildland Areas - Overhead Transmission Lines

Economic Matters: March 4, 2025

UNFAVORABLE

Testimony submitted by:

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NextEra Energy Transmission (NEET) line(s) could be much broader than bill language suggests: (Feb. 3, 2025 phone meeting with NextEra Energy Transmission — NEET):

During a Feb. 3, 2025 telephone meeting, Kaitlin McCormick (Senior Director of Development, NextEra Energy) shared that their successful PJM bid (submitted May 2023; awarded December 2023) for a ***Mid-Atlantic Energy Link would allow for up to a 16-17 mile wide corridor that could accommodate multiple transmission lines as long as these are adjacent to current electric transmission lines' ROW.***

My reading of Sen. McKay's bill indicates that development up to this extent would not be precluded in the three Wildlands targeted by HB1270, though NEET says their intent is one new line with a 200' wide ROW. NEET was only clear that additional lines must be exclusive to existing ROW. **Width of ROW for new lines is not specified in bill language.**

Preservation of Maryland's Wildlands, farmland and private property:

COMAR 08.01.02.02: "A. Purpose: . . . to provide for their protection, for the preservation of their wildland character, and for gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment."

The intent of this Wildlands' preservation is undermined by HB1270. The bill claims that there is a public need to locate overhead transmission lines through three Wildland areas: Big Savage Mountain, Bear Pen, and Dan's Mountain, an area of 8,443 preserved acres in Garrett and Allegany Counties. But the developer, NextEra Energy, could follow other corridors in our region and not sacrifice Wildlands in order to bring electricity to out of state data centers.

Additionally, NEET will need easements from private property owners in order to construct transmission corridors. **Land agents hired by NEET are already approaching property owners in Allegany and Garrett counties**, though they have not announced this publicly nor publicly revealed their proposed route for these lines.

Land agents, interested in making the best deal for the company, rather than fairly compensating landowners, operate in secrecy and with urgency. They urge landowners to sign on the spot, without attorney's advice. Once signed, the landowner(s) (or their heirs) are stuck in that contract until the project is built or cancelled, and signing a non-disclosure agreement is standard operating procedure for such contracts.

Secrecy and lack of transparency, especially from Sen. McKay, Del. Hinebaugh and NEET, are never a good sign for property owners. Property owners should have full information, including knowing that the project is fully permitted by the State and appropriate agencies. If the project isn't permitted, NEET can sell landowner easements to the highest bidder.

Opportunity for Public Input **not** provided by Sen. McKay, NEET, or DNR prior to bill submission and both Senate and House hearings:

Ms. McCormick said that property owners living within 2 miles of proposed transmission lines would be notified by postcard by the end of February 2025 with public hearings held thereafter. A much larger area of private land holdings, including agricultural and conservation-designated lands, would be affected.

Very late in the game — February 27 — DNR announced a public meeting “. . . an open house style setting to gather feedback from the public regarding impacts to wildlands. There will be no formal presentations by the Department.” DNR has decided not to share what they know about this project, including potential harms to state-protected lands — especially Wildlands — and relevant COMAR regulations.

At no point have NEET or Sen. McKay provided an opportunity for the general public to provide feedback to their proposal or to legislation that would enshrine their project and significantly diminish protection of Maryland-designated Wildlands and potentially subject private holdings to eminent domain.

While I am opposed to ANY ADDITIONAL development or incursion in Maryland's protected Wildlands, I am particularly concerned about HB1270 because it offers no specification of the width or number of transmission lines that could be allowed adjacent to Potomac Edison's current ROW within wildlands.

I urge an Unfavorable Report for HB1270

Thank you for this opportunity to share my concerns, Ann Bristow