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Written Testimony of Private Citizen
HB1270 - NATURAL RESOURCES-WILDLAND AREAS-OVERHEAD TRANSMISSION LINES
(Sponsor – Delegate Hinebaugh)
Economic Matters Committee

Request: **UNFAVORABLE** report for the following reasons:

HB1270 is a direct violation of the Wildlands Preservation System statute, [Natural Resources Article §5–1203](#), which established a system of **PRESERVATION** for special, natural places to protect them from “growing mechanization” to leave them unimpaired as wildlands for future generations.

The value of these Wildlands is as places of rich biodiversity where some of the most endangered and sensitive species and habitats in our state can live and function in a natural ecosystem. Lands that filter and guard headwater streams to support declining populations of aquatic organisms and to provide clean waters for downstream drinking water and to dilute polluted waters of other Potomac River tributaries laid to waste by historic high-sulfur coal mining, contributing to better health in downstream urban areas and the Chesapeake Bay. And as places people can go to experience nature, to walk, to fish, to hunt, to photograph, to learn, and to teach about natural processes and to experience a simpler way of life away from modern stresses. Their value is in their ecosystem services, as nature tourism assets, and as contributors to the climate resilience in our state.

I’ve been puzzled why this bill is in Economic Matters and not Environment and Transportation as Natural Resource statute amendments have historically been considered. In 2022, HB882 Natural Resources – Pocomoke River Wildland – Alteration of Boundaries was considered in that committee, the last Wildlands bill in the House. This bill followed the legislatively approved COMAR process for consideration of exceptions to construct a trail in the Pocomoke Wildlands: Originated in the Governor’s Office, public notification, public engagement, significant evaluation of resource impacts, extensive design work and consideration of alternatives, establishment of public need and a proposal brought to the House by the Governor’s staff as a proposal (see [Md. Code Regs. 08.01.02.05B](#) for the process).


This bill and proposed transmission lines follow none of these required regulatory processes. First, Delegate Hinebaugh and NextEra have bypassed the Governor’s office even though NextEra had 17 months from the time of their contract award to do so. In terms of public need, none has been given, in the Senate the only reason provided for needing to go through these Wildlands was that it was cheaper. They stated it would be 3 to 4 miles more to go around. Cheaper for whom? It is my understanding that this is a fixed cost contract of \$683 million for the 105-mile transmission line, that’s \$6.5 million per mile. The consumers who are paying for this, plus interest, will see none of these savings. The additional cost would reduce the \$300 - \$500 million in projected cash profit for NextEra by less than 4%. In terms of true cost, estimated at \$1 - \$3 million per mile, it would be less than 1%*. Do we really need to

undermine our Wildlands Preservation System to provide corporate charity to a company who earned \$6.9 billion in profits last year. Also 3-4 miles away in either direction would put the transmission line in areas of abandoned or active strip mines with virtually no reduction of impacts to legacy farms or other conserved lands in the other 24 miles of transmission line in Maryland.

Passage of HR1270 would undermine our Wildland Preservation System statute and intent. It violates COMAR regulations of prohibited activities in Wildlands and defined exception processes. It would not only cause degradation of our protected natural resources but destroy a key economic asset of our region that has been a major contributor to our economy since the 1920s. These Wildlands should be the last place to consider for this transmission line not the first in my opinion.

Thank you for protecting our state Wildland Preservation System and returning an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HR1270.

Respectfully,



Steve Storck

* Note: Finding actual costs for the construction of transmission lines is a well-guarded secret of the industry. The numbers provided are a best guess estimate based on several sources. Here is one source that discusses some of the complicated estimates:

Renewable Energy World – What would it cost to bury all of California’s power lines?
January 27, 2025 - <https://www.renewableenergyworld.com/power-grid/outage-management/what-would-it-cost-to-bury-all-of-californias-power-lines>

Much of the cost discussion centers around the cost of reducing wildfire risk from transmission lines. Burying the lines is deemed impractical as it is high-cost with estimates at \$3-\$4 million per mile, NextEra is charging \$6.5 million for this line and PJM estimated its cost at \$12 million per mile. For comparison I found that it would cost approximately \$2 million per mile to cover a 2-lane road in 24k gold leaf purchased at retail prices. We need better independent estimates of the costs of these transmission lines. Even if my numbers are wildly off looking at annual profits for transmission line construction companies like NextEra who earned \$6.9 Billion in profits in 2024 and \$7.3 Billion in 2023 should give you some indication of the magnitude of markup and added interest charges involved.

NextEra Energy Earnings Report 4th Quarter 2024
<https://www.investor.nexteraenergy.com/~media/Files/N/NEE-IR/news-and-events/events-and-presentations/2025/2025-0124%20NEEQ42024News%20Release%20vFinal.pdf>