

Natural Resources - Wildland Areas - Overhead Transmission Lines

House Economic Matters Committee

March 4, 2025

Position: **UNFAVORABLE**

•Importance of PROTECTIONS for Wildlands and undeveloped land across mountain Maryland

For over 50 years, Maryland's leaders have understood the importance of protecting resources that we know are irreplaceable: our beautiful and treasured Wild lands.

Our steadfast commitment to environmental protection and conservation has allowed Maryland's mountain counties to attract visitors who ultimately invest in the region to become part of its tourism-based economy. My family's presence is an example of such an investment: for the past 29 years we have operated an agri-tourism business north of Friendsville. We welcome a lot of visitors who return regularly to explore state parks and wild areas.

Three large Wildlands areas in Garrett and Allegany Counties (totalling 8,443 preserved acres, designated in COMAR 08.01.02.02) are Big Savage Mountain, Bear Pen, and Dan's Mountain. These protected areas are now under immediate threat by claims, articulated in **HB1270**, that there is public need to expand overhead transmission lines across Maryland, through both mountain counties. The Mid Atlantic Resiliency Link (MARL), a massive power transmission line corridor proposed by Next Era Energy Transmission (NEET) is slated to slice across forests, farmland, valuable residential property, as well as these Wildlands areas.

The project's future requires **passage of HB1270**, a bill that **would completely undermine Wildlands protections, while setting the stage for future damage to forests, farmland, and valuable residential real estate.**

Garrett County's economy is based primarily on natural resources tourism. Surely the bill's sponsor, Delegate Hinebaugh, is aware that this bill threatens the interests of anyone in Garrett County whose work depends on our protected Wildlands and the beauty of our farms and forested mountains. I hope I am not the only person working in this sector to remind our representatives that our environment matters, not just in the immediate surroundings of Deep Creek Lake, but all across the

mountain counties. Allowing massive energy projects in the most rural parts of our counties will not hide them from visitors, because part of the appeal of visiting is exploring the countryside and visiting small businesses.

•The introduction of HB1270 (and companion SB0399) has taken place without appropriate public input.

These bills have been put forward in the assembly prior to making any meaningful information available to the public and potential stakeholders in this area. Claims that 50 public meetings have taken place about the MARL project, are simply not true. To the best of my knowledge, the first and only public information session about this project has been scheduled by DNR for March 13, 2025, at Savage River Lodge, an exceedingly remote venue that is not easily accessible to many area residents. (In the past, the State has convened well-attended public meetings in accessible auditoriums at Frostburg State, Allegany College, UMCES, or Garrett College. Why change to a remote retreat on a poorly maintained road?)

Information from the senate sponsor's office about the companion bill is, at best, confusing, and at worst, misleading. The senator's newsletter to constituents claims that this project would not have an impact on farmland. The newsletter says:

"NextEra Energy Transmission LLC is proposing this line; the difference would be this would NOT go through farmland whatsoever. It instead would go through wildlands that *are protected by the state or the federal government. As a result it would not be as big an issue for our counties' residents. I do want to stress that the plans for this are in the beginning stages only and NextERA, as well as myself, want to make sure that the problem that occurred with Piedmont DOES NOT repeat itself.

We are being cautious so that way we will make sure your voice is heard as well as local governments should any concern arise."

My property borders an area where an existing major transmission line crosses Garrett County, and I can assure you, that line crosses plenty of farmland. Adding multiple transmission lines to this right-of-way would certainly impact many acres of farmland, residential real estate, and potentially cross the protected Youghiogheny Wild & Scenic corridor.

Unfortunately, at the time of this hearing, I can find only a very general map of this project on NextEra's website that shows my home and property in the vague area Next Era is willing to publish. For average

citizens it is not possible to understand one's status as a potential stakeholder, yet hearings on the bill are taking place, moving toward a vote by the Assembly.

How many property owners will miss an opportunity to weigh in with this committee? You can't know what you don't know.

As a business and property owner in northern Garrett County, **I am opposed to any additional development or incursion in Maryland's protected Wildlands** (which in Garrett County have already come under threat by trail development interests and by a bridge and road project at Swallow Falls State Park). Maryland's leaders should **oppose any energy/infrastructure development that is allowed to take place without a transparent process for study and public input**, as well as full, clear disclosure to the parties facing potential impacts.

Due to lack of appropriate public input I respectfully request that this bill be withdrawn. If the committee will not choose this course, **I urge you to render an Unfavorable Report for SB399.**

Sincerely,

Nadine Grabania
Garrett County Resident, small business owner
177 Frazee Ridge Road
Friendsville, MD 21531