



SB0399
Natural Resources – Wildland Areas – Overhead Transmission Lines
Testimony before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Hearing February 11
Position: Unfavorable

Dear Chair Senator Feldman and Vice-Chair Senator Kagan, and members of the committee, my name is Julia Lawrence, and I represent the 900+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today **opposing SB0399**, which would exempt certain areas in the Big Savage Mountain Wildland, Bear Pen Wildland, and Dan’s Mountain Wildland from being designated as wildland areas. This bill would allow NextEra Energy Transmission MidAtlantic, Inc., through certain affiliates, designated by PJM Interconnection, LLC, to construct an overhead transmission line through the wildlands.

Maryland Wildlands are areas of state-owned land or water that have retained their wilderness character or contain rare or vanishing species of plant or animal life or similar features worthy of preservation. Designated by the Maryland General Assembly, they may include unique ecological, geological, scenic, and contemplative recreational areas. Wildlands are managed for passive recreation only, including hiking, hunting, fishing, bird watching. [1]

Indivisible HoCoMD is not supporting this bill because studies show that operation and maintenance of transmission lines often result in negative environmental impacts.

Transmission lines are typically overhead wires at voltages of 110 to 765 kilovolts supported by towers. A transmission line is built within an area known as a right-of-way (ROW). The ROW is often 100 to 2,000 feet or more wide in order to accommodate maintenance of the lines. The ROW maintenance alone often involves the chemical or mechanical control of vegetation that can contribute to the loss of native plant species diversity. Cleared ROWs may be a continuous source of sedimentation into waterways. [2]

Transmission lines can “displace wildlife from their habitat, act as barriers to wildlife movement and affect migration routes. They have the potential to impact sensitive ecosystems such as wetlands, impact high quality fishery resources when waterways are crossed, and create pathways for the spread of invasive species.” [3]

One specific environmental impact is on birds. Studies show that electrical wires are a significant threat to birds: between 8 million and 57 million birds die each year in the United States by colliding with them and from electrocution by contact with them. [4,5] There are over 100 species of birds in Maryland wildlands. The American Bittern, the Least Tern, the Nashville Warbler, and the Red Knot are some threatened bird species in Maryland. [6]

An alternative to routing an overhead transmission line through these sensitive wildlands would be to construct the towers following the major highways that are already built, and which run alongside the wildlands. One example would be along Interstate 68. Interstate highways are more accessible and easier to maintain in the long run. Construction along them would be less disruptive to the wildlands and to the many threatened species of plants and animals we still have.

Thank you for your time in considering this testimony.

We respectfully urge an unfavorable report.

Julia Lawrence
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Sources:

[1] [DansMtWMA_VisionPlan.pdf](#)

[2] [Electric Transmission Lines | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#)

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] [Bird Safety a Concern in National Push to Build More Power Lines | Audubon](#)

[5] "Bird Strikes and Electrocutions at Power Lines, Communication Towers, and Wind Turbines: State of the Art and State of the Science – Next Steps Toward Mitigation," Albert M. Manville, II, [psw_qtr191_1051-1064_manville.pdf](#)

[6] [Threatened Species of Maryland – Maryland Ornithological Society](#)