

## **SB0399 Natural Resources - Wildland Areas - Overhead Transmission Lines**

Education, Energy, and the Environment: February 7, 2025

### **UNFAVORABLE**

Testimony submitted by:

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**NextEra Energy Transmission 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 SB0399, 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. *Why isn't NEET's intent reflected in this overly broad legislation?*

**Width of ROW for new lines is not specified in bill language.**

Preservation of Maryland's Wildlands:

***Just as we did not foresee the exponential energy demands of artificial intelligence and data centers, so are we unable to tell the future of the importance of protected Wildlands*** with their biodiversity and life sustaining, abundant resources. Fifty-two years ago our legislators had foresight to protect Maryland's Wildlands, ultimately designating 38 areas, as stated in 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 SB0399. 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.

Recent developments in the AI market suggest that data centers and AI might not need to suck up so much electricity — and, therefore, water — for their operations. Open-source DeepSeek is significantly more energy efficient because it was developed by engineers much more attuned to energy restrictions than U.S. developers accustomed to richness both of resources and government subsidies. Thus, Sen. McKay’s bill is also premature. We may not need to exploit and diminish Maryland’s Wildlands in order to support projected growth.

Opportunity for Public Input *not* provided by Sen. McKay or NEET prior to bill submission:

Ms. McCormick said that property owners living within 2 miles of proposed transmission lines will 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. **NEET has maps of line placements but has not shared them publicly or with DNR.**

At no point has 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 SB0399 because it offers no specification of the width or number of transmission lines that could be allowed adjacent to Potomac Edison’s current ROW.

**I urge an Unfavorable Report for SB399**

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