



Conserving farms and forests in the North Country

Northern Pass Role and Strategy

Overview

The proposed high voltage power line (“Northern Pass”) presents major environmental and economic challenges to our North Country. The proposal is highly complex, highly political, and has enormous financial implications – namely significant potential gains for some and huge losses for others – especially here. How we as a region respond to this proposal, and its ultimate outcome, may be the defining issue of our time.

The proposed Northern Pass would bisect the New Hampshire side of the Connecticut River watershed. Running from Pittsburgh south through Coös County it is proposed to cut through intact forest on a new right of way. In Grafton County, it is proposed to run largely on existing but significantly widened rights of way. The towers would be “industrial” in scale and construction – not the wood ones now used. The power from Hydro Quebec is to feed the New England power grid. Northern New Hampshire is now a net energy exporter, so it does not require this power, and New Hampshire as a whole is not currently posed to use this power either. However, PSNH would receive significant revenue from the transmission of the power.

ACT’s Position

The Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust is the North Country’s locally based and operated land conservancy trust serving 22 towns in northern Grafton and Coös counties. The proposed project directly affects this area. The mission of the Trust is: *to encourage land conservation as an integral part of the growth and future well being of New Hampshire’s North Country, through conserving places with ecological, historic, community, or scenic values. We especially focus on conserving the farms and working forests that are the foundation of our region’s economy and character.*

ACT has filed for intervener status with the U.S. Department of Energy. Our petition states that ACT believes the project as proposed:

- 1) Lacks important detail about design, route, and impact that will allow citizens to fully understand the scope of the project;
- 2) Does not consider potentially lower impact alternatives, such as using existing transmission routes in eastern Vermont, using routes along existing roads and highways, and underground transmission;
- 3) Could have a severe adverse impact on the integrity of the North Country landscape, which is a fundamental asset of the region’s economy and culture.

As an organization dedicated to protecting the values of wildlife habitat, public recreation, scenic view sheds, intact working forests, and an economy and culture integrally related to the form and use of our region’s land and landscape, we have “an interest which may be directly affected by the outcome of the proceeding.”

The ACT Board of Directors has resolved to “oppose the Northern Pass project as currently proposed as inconsistent with ACT’s mission.”

Affect on Landowners and Communities

There are a host of issues arising from the proposed Northern Pass, including how “green” this power source actually is, to the issue of reliance on another foreign country for energy, environmental justice issues around our region’s being simply a conduit for power needs far away at the expense of our landscape, the effect of the power lines fragmenting intact forest habitat, and the obvious implications of industrial power lines on our North Country landscape. Our landscape is our single greatest economic asset, it is the foundation of our heritage and traditions, and is what draws people here, inspires them, and makes them stay.

The proposed route of the power line directly affects land and conservation easements ACT owns and stewards. In addition, there are many landowners who are not direct abutters whose property will be affected by the power line, as it affects views, trails, and wildlife corridors. Towns are concerned that property values will drop as a result and tax revenue will diminish. Purchase and sales agreements on properties are already being dropped, and some planned conservation projects are also being reconsidered as the property values are potentially drastically diminished by the prospect of the high-tension power lines. Thus, property “takings” may already be occurring without any due process. In addition to this issue, there are important questions about eminent domain powers. The question is whether this project is truly “in the public interest,” which is a prerequisite for the exercise of eminent domain.

ACT’s Role

As the only grassroots land conservation organization in the North Country, ACT represents the voices of local residents, our members, and landowners. We are being called on by landowners and towns to help provide information on the options available to them as they consider their own responses to the Northern Pass proposal. We are working with individuals and organizations to map out strategies to oppose the project based on accurate information, science, and fact. In this role we are also working on how to clearly communicate to landowners, towns, and other residents the implications of the project. We will also work directly with our own conservation landowners, and other landowners whose properties actually abut or are otherwise affected to understand legal resources and strategies available.

ACT is also dedicated to turning this issue of opposition to the proposed project as an opportunity for our region to define what it is for: renewable energy that is compatible with our land, our people, and our traditions. We are for a landscape that is integrated into the economy and well being of all residents, that is valued for its beauty and its productivity, and that adds value to our lives.

To achieve this role, ACT will focus in the following areas:

- Assist in collection of data (example: names and addresses of all property owners affected by the proposal);
- Collect information on affected land sales and conservation projects stalled or cancelled because of the project;
- Define the conservation values that will be undermined by power line construction on our own lands and assist towns and landowners with determining these on their lands;
- Partner with other organizations to hold landowner information sessions through our region;
- Devise best communications strategies to reach landowners, other residents, and local towns;
- Continue hosting and facilitating regional discussions on strategies, sharing of information, leveraging volunteer efforts;

- Engage our own legal counsel in understanding implications for our own land and of our conservation easements;
- Participate in statewide strategies for influencing local, state, and federal officials;
- Communicate a positive vision of the future of our region, based on a land ethic that respects people and landscape as interconnected and vital.

The Investment

In order to carry out this work, ACT needs to raise funds to supplement its limited operating budget, which is already committed to other land conservation projects. ACT invites donations specifically for the purpose of outreach, education, and advocacy around the Northern Pass issue. ACT is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and donations are tax deductible.