

The Potomac Highland Steward

DECEMBER 2007

ELECTRIC AVENUE

240 MILES OF HIGH-VOLTAGE UGLY?

Allegheny Energy is attempting to cut another high-voltage power line over our mountains and through our communities. Don't let their quaint name – TrAIL, short for Trans-Allegheny Interstate Line – fool you. This proposed high-voltage powerline that would slash through the Potomac Highlands has mushroomed from a backyard nuisance into a national environmental controversy. In November, environmental and historic preservation groups asked for a rehearing of a federal decision letting new high voltage lines criss-cross the northeast US corridor from West Virginia as far as Ohio and New York, even where the states find they're not needed.

These corridors are based on a new provision attached by Congress to the 2005 Energy Policy Act, which allows electric companies to condemn right of ways using eminent domain powers in areas that are found electrically congested. These proposals provide a market for some of the nation's oldest coal plants—the same plants that have been cited for air pollution, and which demand coal, much of it from mountaintop removal.

The land use problems add more ugliness to this already disturbing picture. Under these definitions, the entire Northeast is subject to condemnation to accommodate new power lines—even national forests, Civil War battlefields, wildlife areas and other places that people have worked for decades to preserve. Among the protesters in the Potomac Highlands is a Buddhist monastery in eastern Hampshire County, Bhavana Society, where the monks value their peace and quiet.

Chris Miller of the Piedmont Environmental Council, one of the organizations filing for rehearing, said, "In designating the first corridors, the Department of Energy failed to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Endangered Species Act. These environmental laws are important tools to protect human health, ecosystems and community values." See PEC web page for the latest news: www.pecva.org

"The power companies have told the Department of Energy they want these transmission line corridors stretching all the way to Ohio and West Virginia because of "increasingly

strict environmental controls" along the East Coast. But we can't allow power companies to exploit long-distance corridors in an attempt to literally run away from our most progressive environmental laws" said Cale Jaffe, Staff Attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center.

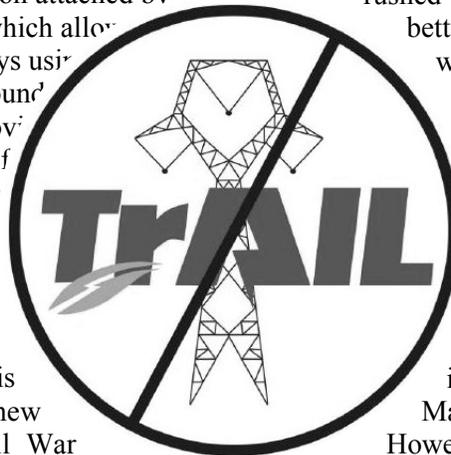
"DOE's sweeping decision dramatically undermines state efforts to address global warming and other important environmental problems," said Mark Brownstein, an energy policy expert at Environmental Defense. "New interstate transmission lines are like superhighways for the oldest and dirtiest coal-fired power plants, and the federal government has made it a whole lot easier to put one in your backyard.

"Rather than take the time to study alternatives and work with states to craft a balanced energy future, DOE has rushed to a decision that favors big coal. There are better ways to do transmission planning, and we are hoping that DOE goes back to the drawing board and works with us, and others, to do it right."

Governments of Pennsylvania and Virginia have filed petitions for rehearing. However, West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin, in a State Journal article on Nov. 1, came out in favor of the powerline due to construction and power industry jobs he says will be created. Manchin has a coal industry background.

However, Capon Valley powerline opponents have advice from retiring PSC ombudsman Billy Jack Gregg, and have organized several information and protest meetings. And second-home realtor Charlie Winfree points out that the powerlines harm West Virginia's growing real estate industry. Property owners can find his analysis on the Capon Valley Coalition web page at www.CaponValleyCoalition.com

"We should all be ashamed to even be considering more long-term heavy investment in coal when we now know it's most likely the biggest culprit in changing our climate, our children's climate and the extermination of many species, quite possibly our own," writes Winfree, who designated half the acreage in his development near Keyser as nature preserve. "Yes, parts of the WV economy may seem to depend on it; just as parts of Columbia's economy depends on cocaine and parts of Afghanistan's economy depends on heroin poppies. There's no big difference and we're all just feeding an unhealthy addiction to cheap and dirty power with this power line. Shame on us."



CORRIDOR H ENOUGH IS ENOUGH?

To the tune of \$840,300,000 -- about twice as much as budgeted -- Corridor H been completed from Moorefield to Wardensville. Another section is currently plowing through the environmentally sensitive South Branch Valley floodplains west of Moorefield. For a map of what's built and unbuilt, see the DOH site www.WVCorridorH.com

Building a four-lane highway through the eastern mountains of West Virginia has always been controversial. There are good points of the 40 miles built so far. You can drive through Hardy County and around Elkins faster for jobs, shopping and visiting. In fact, driving it across the mountaintops is so grandly private and strangely quiet, you feel the government has spent the \$840 million just for you. Bad points: we can't even remember what those mountains and hollows used to look like. Farms, wildlife, historic sites and houses are gone forever.

More people are stopping in Wardensville, where Corridor H currently ends. Projects the town has worked on for years, a visitors center and an antique shop, have opened, along with practical hardware and drug stores and a fun new Main Street coffeehouse and gourmet and craft shop called Trout Provisions.

But businesses catering to outdoor tourism, arts, and history are also thriving in Thomas and Davis, Tucker County -- two other small towns that Corridor H has not reached. If Corridor H goes all the way through, it will bypass all these downtown businesses and encourage more truck stops and fast food stores at the interchanges instead. This is an outdated model of economic development. According to new surveys presented at the Create WV conference last month, small towns and country roads draw a lot of folks to West Virginia. In fact, central WV has a new publication full of whimsical articles for locals and tourists. It's called "Two Lane Living." The future lies in cherishing what is unique about West Virginia, not in trying to create another suburb.

Meanwhile, WV politicians are searching desperately in DC for funding to complete the 100-mile four-lane, which was named as a top environmental boondoggle by Friends of the Earth. The latest funding idea -- seriously discussed by Gov. Joe Manchin's administration and Senator Byrd -- promotes Corridor H as an escape route for millions escaping DC after a terrorist attack. Imagine the joy of thousands of panicky motorists being dumped into the middle of the Mon Forest! What's left of West Virginia -- what isn't covered by powerlines, oversized windmills, or coal-removed mountaintops -- may be trampled underfoot when the gas runs out.

Corridor H would be most helpful if the highway department quits building it now, before more damage is done.

WIND TURBINES TOO MANY, TOO BIG, WRONG PLACES

Imagine a single wind turbine over 400 feet tall on a 3,800 foot mountain top -- a curiosity, perhaps a point of interest for tourists. Now add hundreds of them, up one ridge and down the next another. Then add acres of tree clearings and roads to build them -- many in wild areas of the Potomac Highlands. Now you have an eyesore and environmental plague. Plus an excuse, now that the mountains are scarred, for more industrial invasions. This is not imaginary, but is actually happening. This is why landowners and residents throughout West Virginia are coming together to save our mountains and challenge the proliferation of wind "farms" in West Virginia.

Must the Potomac Highlands be sacrificed for this green energy scam? Why aren't alternatives to these monstrosities being implemented? Small turbines could be installed on roof tops right in the cities where power is needed.

Greenbrier County conservationists are challenging Beech Ridge Energy LLC / Chicago-based Invenergy LLC over a \$300 million, 124-turbine project in western Greenbrier County. Residents are awaiting a WV Supreme Court ruling on their appeal of the PSC approval decision.

Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County successfully intervened at the Public Service Commission against US Wind Force's Liberty Gap project in Pendleton County. The developer proposed 50 turbines on Jack Mountain, running from the state line north for approximately 6 miles in the county.

The Laurel Mountain Preservation Association is challenging the romantic green image of wind power. AES, a \$14 billion power company from Virginia, wants to build up to 80 windmills on Laurel Mountain, crossing both Randolph and Barbour counties.

Landowners in Grant County, represented by former WV Supreme Court Chief Justice Richard Neely, filed a nuisance law suit against NedPower/Shell Wind Energy/Dominion protesting property devaluation, noise and hazardous effects of the giant spinning blades.

Phase I turbines of the huge Grant County project are now visible for 40 miles.

Sadly, our mountains--our backyards, our wilderness areas, wildlife, and wildlife habitats are being sacrificed by large companies not just to grab coal, but now in the name of "green energy." The road building and clearing of forests will pollute watersheds and destroy highland wetlands.

Federal tax benefits pay as much as 65% of the cost of building huge windmill "plants" in the U.S. Huge energy companies use these well-intentioned renewable-energy tax breaks to cut costs and continue to generate most of their power with fossil fuel. The huge windmills also require a reserve of power to operate -- in other words, they have to take electricity from the power grid in order to generate power.

The unfortunate truth is: Big Wind is mostly hot air. Help us save your mountain top today! Send donations to Stewards of the Potomac Highlands, and don't forget to ask questions of your county commissioners, state legislators and Congress members.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK

We depend solely on your contributions. We didn't ask for contributions last year, because we didn't want to compete with fund-raising for Hurricane Katrina victims. We are an advocacy group and we lobby to protect our Potomac Highlands, so we are not tax-deductible.

Please clip out this form (if your mailing label is correct on the back you do not have to fill out your name and address below), and make your check payable to **Stewards of the Potomac Highlands**. You may use the enclosed envelope or mail it to PO Box 455, Wardensville, WV 26851.

__ \$25 __ \$50 __ \$200 __ \$500 Other: _____

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Email address:

Phone:

Websites you'd like us to link to:

Talents & connections:

Areas of greatest concern:

WHAT WE ARE

Stewards of the Potomac Highlands is a nonprofit 501(c)(4) citizens group aiming to preserve open spaces, forests, farmland, rural communities and towns and foster stewardship of the Potomac Highlands of West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland. We promote ways to make a living in our area without destroying our air, soil, water, wildlife and scenery. We encourage community and transportation planning for sustainable economic development which will protect the environment, discourage sprawl, and support family and community cohesion, local business, local history and culture.

Stewards of the Potomac Highlands is networking among citizens in the eight northeastern counties of West Virginia. We will support and publicize existing group efforts. On certain issues we will take the lead. We want to encourage all who labor so faithfully on behalf of their little corner of Planet Earth.

OUR DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS

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We're always looking for board members and volunteers. Please email us at info@potomacstewards.com or send a note to PO Box 455, Wardensville, WV 26851.



Stewards of the Potomac Highlands
PO Box 455
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www.PotomacStewards.com

RAIL I-81 SOLUTIONS

CHUGGING ALONG SLOWLY BUT SURELY

After two years of citizens advocating that the obvious solution to the congestion on I-81- is to put some of the 40% truck traffic on trains, railroad companies and government have gotten down to some serious proposals. Norfolk Southern, whose tracks parallel I-81, has come up with the idea of an enhanced rail corridor all the way from Harrisburg Pa, through Knoxville KY(where I-81 ends) all the way to Memphis, TN. They would work on scattered sections at a time. However, the citizens group Rail Solutions wants a program where the I-81 section, all 600 miles, is built as a pilot project so the public can see how many trucks are taken off the road. Also, they want to make sure the railroad's method of operation appeals to the small truckers which are the bulk of I-81's traffic.

At the same time, CSX Transportation has unveiled a proposal for a streamlined north-south rail corridor between DC and Florida with capacity for both freight and 110-mile-per hour passenger freight trains. They propose to finance this with government help by way of tax breaks for rail expansion. The public benefits are obvious: faster and more energy efficient shipping for business, and taking a lot of cars and trucks off the road.

Details are at the Rail Solutions website: www.RailSolution.org