

For Immediate Release: December 6, 2012

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Conservation Groups Move to Stop Power Line Construction Before Irreversible Damage Is Done

Susquehanna-Roseland line through New Jersey and Pennsylvania would cause significant harm to treasured national parks

WASHINGTON, DC – A coalition of national, regional and local conservation groups filed a motion for a preliminary injunction in federal court today to stop construction of the Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line through three popular national parks – the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, the Middle Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River, and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail – while the court considers claims that the power line will cause irreversible ecological and scenic damage. The National Park Service (“NPS”) approved the supersized transmission line on October 1, 2012, despite the agency’s conclusion that the project, as approved, would cause serious and enduring impacts on the parks.

As authorized by the NPS, the massive 500KV power line would slice through the parks, impairing spectacular scenery, damaging rare geological and ecological resources, and marring the recreational experience for the more than 5.2 million people who visit the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area each year. The NPS’s approval of the transmission line contradicts the agency’s governing mandate to protect the National Park System “unimpaired for future generations” as required by the 1916 National Park Service Organic Act.

Construction and pre-construction activities have already begun on segments of the transmission line in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Construction activities in the national park units will occur imminently. [In a July 2012 environmental impact study conducted for the NPS](#), the human use and ecological impacts from the project were estimated to cost \$89 million.

“The National Park Service has approved a project that is poised to permanently damage treasured public resources. Construction-related activities in the Delaware Water Gap could begin at any time, and if a preliminary injunction is not granted, the damage will be done before the court even gets a chance to decide the claims that are before it,” said Hannah Chang, attorney with the public interest environmental law firm Earthjustice, representing the conservation groups along with the New Jersey-based non-profit Eastern Environmental Law Center. “The circumstances here demand that construction be put on hold for now, so that the court at least has an opportunity to consider the claims raised.”

At stake is nothing less than the Delaware Water Gap’s spellbinding views, pristine environment, and diverse wildlife that include bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and black bears. The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area was named a Top 10 most-photogenic national park for fall foliage, and is the eighth most visited national park unit in the country. The Delaware River is one of the cleanest rivers in the nation. The Appalachian Trail, completed 75 years ago, and designated as the nation’s first national

scenic trail in 1968, is enjoyed by 2-3 million people each year. Together, these national parks offer some of the very best outdoor recreational opportunities for those living in the Mid-Atlantic region.

“Countless public dollars and volunteer hours have gone into protecting special places like the Delaware Water Gap,” explained Mark Zakutansky, Mid-Atlantic Policy Manager for the Appalachian Mountain Club. “Allowing irreplaceable scenic vistas, trails, and wildlife habitat to be permanently damaged violates the Park Service’s mission and sends the wrong message about the value of our national treasures. We have to halt this construction, at least for now, so the court can review the case.”

The transmission line crosses unique and sensitive resources in the parks. “In the National Park Service’s Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Susquehanna to Roseland line, it found that this project would ‘degrade the integrity of resources and the scenic landscape’ in the parks and ‘appreciably diminish key aspects of the parks’ that visitors enjoy,” said Cinda Waldbuesser, Pennsylvania senior program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association. “That clearly violates the Organic Act which requires the agency to ‘conserve the scenery’ and protect park resources from impairment. We intend to hold the National Park Service accountable to their core park preservation mission.”

“The Susquehanna-Roseland line will cause irreparable harm and permanent damage to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. We cannot allow this violation of the public trust to go forward. Since the Park Service’s decision will not protect the parks, we have to. In the 150 years since our first National Park was established, this is one of the worst decisions ever made by the National Park Service. If they can do it here, Yellowstone or Yosemite could be next,” said Jeff Tittel, Director, NJ Sierra Club.

“The Park Service’s Environmental Impact Statement failed to fully assess the total and cumulative impacts outside the park that will have a direct and indirect impact on the natural resources within the park boundary, including a Wild and Scenic portion of the Delaware River,” said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper. “Construction, including clear-cutting forests, filling wetlands and road building, will cross over the Lackawaxen River, the Bushkill Creek and many other streams in Pennsylvania and New Jersey outside the Park, impacting water quality and habitat because many of these streams flow directly into the Delaware River within the park.”

The new transmission line is being built by Public Service Electric and Gas Co. (PSE&G) in New Jersey and Pennsylvania Power and Light Electric Utilities (PPL) in Pennsylvania. The project would include constructing new towers that would rise more than twice as high as existing towers, clearing trees, and constructing staging areas and access roads through the parks.

To accommodate this new construction, the NPS has decided to grant a special use permit for construction and an expanded right-of-way. “There is a staggering amount of evidence about the environmental damage that will occur if the project rips through the parks,” said Marc Ross, Executive Director of Rock the Earth. “The giant towers and wider right-of-way create a huge visual disturbance where very little disturbance currently exists. These impacts will affect the experience of a large number of park visitors.”

The conservation groups are challenging NPS’s approval of the transmission line as a violation of the NPS Organic Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. They also point to deficiencies in the agency’s required environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The motion to stop construction of the Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line until the court rules on whether the NPS approval complies with federal law was filed by Earthjustice and Eastern Environmental Law Center on behalf of the Appalachian Mountain Club, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, Delaware Riverkeeper Network, New Jersey Highlands Coalition, New York–New Jersey Trail Conference, National Parks Conservation Association, Rock the Earth, Sierra Club, and Stop the Lines.

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About the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC): AMC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the mountains, forests, waters, and trails of the Appalachian region. With 100,000 members and supporters, AMC has a long history of recreation and stewardship in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, including the maintenance of over 30 miles of trails within the park. For more information, please visit www.outdoors.org.

About the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC): ATC represents 43,000 members and 31 Appalachian Trail maintaining clubs in pursuing its mission to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail. In 1925, ATC initiated the creation of the Appalachian Trail, and today, it supports the management of the Trail under a formal cooperative management agreement with the National Park Service and agreements with its Trail maintaining clubs. For more information, please visit www.appalachiantrail.org.

About the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC): ANJEC is a non-profit educational organization whose mission is to achieve sustainable use of New Jersey's natural resources through leadership, education, and support of environmental commissions and other local boards, public officials, environmental organizations, and concerned citizens. ANJEC has over 2,700 members, including municipal environmental commissioners. For more information, please visit www.anjec.org.

About the Delaware Riverkeeper Network (DRN): DRN is a non-profit organization established to champion the rights of communities to a free-flowing, clean, and healthy Delaware River. DRN's staff and volunteers work throughout the Delaware River watershed to protect and restore the ecological, recreational, commercial, and aesthetic qualities of the Delaware River and its tributaries, ecosystems, and habitats. For more information, please visit www.delawareriverkeeper.org.

About the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA): Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in the fight to safeguard our National Park System. With more than 750,000 members and supporters, NPCA is the largest independent membership organization dedicated to protecting our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for our children and grandchildren. For more information, please visit www.npca.org.

About the New Jersey Highlands Coalition: The New Jersey Highlands Coalition is a local non-profit organization that represents both individual members and a diverse network of 72 local, regional, state, and national organizations in pursuing the goal of protecting, enhancing, and restoring the New Jersey Highlands and preserving the quality and quantity of drinking water from the Highlands region on which millions in the surrounding area depend. For more information, please visit www.njhighlandscoalition.org.

About the New York–New Jersey Trail Conference (TC): The TC is a non-profit federation dedicated to developing and maintaining hiking trails; protecting trail lands; and educating the public in the responsible use of trails and the natural environment. In the 1920's, the TC built the Appalachian Trail through New Jersey and New York and continues to maintain the Trail in collaboration with ATC and the National Park Service. For more information, please visit www.nynjtc.org.

About Rock the Earth: Rock the Earth is a Pennsylvania nonprofit conservation organization with approximately 2,000 members whose mission is to protect America's natural resources through partnerships with the music industry and the world-wide environmental community. Rock the Earth serves as an advocate to ensure a sustainable and healthy environment for communities across the country. For more information, please visit www.rocktheearth.org.

About the Sierra Club: Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is a national conservation organization dedicated to exploring, enjoying, and protecting the wild places of the earth and to practicing and promoting the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources. The Sierra Club's New Jersey Chapter has approximately 20,000 members, and its Pennsylvania Chapter has approximately 24,000 members. For more information, please visit www.sierraclub.org.

About Stop the Lines: Stop the Lines is a New Jersey-based grassroots organization dedicated to raising awareness about the Susquehanna-Roseland Line. Stop the Lines and its 440 members engage in citizen education and political action to raise public awareness about the harms that would be caused by the construction of the transmission line and the lack of need for this costly and intrusive infrastructure project. For more information, please visit www.stophelines.com.