Maine Stream, June 6, 2018, 638 words, CMP

It’s hard to imagine a worse project than Central Maine Power’s proposal to construct a massive new transmission line through Maine to move electricity from Quebec to Massachusetts. The good people of New Hampshire rejected CMP’s proposal, so they’ve moved it to Maine.

They did change one thing in their plan. They promised New Hampshire $200 million for community betterment, economic development, clean energy innovation, and tourism promotion. No such offer has been made to Maine. Earlier, when they sought to build their project in Vermont, they promised that state $372 million.

Yup, CMP thinks we’re a cheap date. And they are hoping we won’t realize that the project won’t reduce greenhouse gas emissions, will cause great harm to our north woods, and will suppress Maine’s development of solar and wind projects, among other problems.

The four chairs of our legislature’s Committees on Environment and Natural Resources and Utilities and Technology expressed their strong opposition to this project in a May 4 letter to the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities. Republican Senators Tom Saviello and David Woodsome and Democratic Representatives Ralph Tucker and Seth Berry presented very compelling arguments against the project.

They noted that the project will not reduce and may actually increase total greenhouse gas emissions, may result in lost jobs, tax revenue, and energy investment in Maine, and does not offer meaningful financial benefits to the people of Maine. They noted that experts from our PUC report that CMP inaccurately inflated projected benefits to Maine.

They reported that the project will suppress existing and future renewable energy generation in Maine due in part to increased congestion on the transmission line. In their letter, these legislators also expressed one of my key concerns, the negative impacts on wildlife, forests, and clean water.

Maine’s Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife has expressed strong concerns and objections to the proposal. DIFW reported that the line will go through several important deer wintering areas which are critical in protecting deer during our snowy and cold winters.

We’ve already lost too many deer wintering areas in the north woods, creating severe problems for our outdoor industries including guides and sporting camps. We’ve gone from more than 300 to about 3 dozen of our traditional sporting camps. While working on a book about Maine’s sporting camps for Down East Books, I asked camp owners what their greatest challenges are, and most said the loss of hunters and anglers. CMP’s project will only make that problem worse.

DIFW also expressed strong concerns about the project’s impacts on streams and fish. I have worked for decades to recognize and protect our native brook trout, and CMP’s project would be disastrous for them. “Maintaining adequate buffers along coldwater streams is critical to protection of water temperatures (and) water quality,” said DIFW.

CMP is proposing only a 25-foot buffer along all streams. This is terribly inadequate, and DIFW insisted that a 100-foot buffer must be maintained along all streams including perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral streams.

I haven’t even written about other concerns including impacts on vernal pools, endangered wildlife, rare ecosystems, and plants.

And of course, this project will drive many tourists out of western and northern Maine, another cruel blow to sporting camps, guides, and rural Maine businesses and towns.

I love the Kennebec Gorge, a magnificent unspoiled section of the Kennebec River in the Forks. Our legislators correctly described the Gorge as “a world-renowned whitewater rafting and fishing spot.” I’ve rafted the Gorge numerous times and even took Linda on a guided fishing adventure in the Gorge one time. CMP proposes to stick their line right over the Gorge, a truly horrible idea.

New Hampshire rejected this proposal due to overstated economic benefits and underestimated environmental risks. Why would Maine find any of this acceptable?

With permission to submit by George Smith, author