

Kirkland, April

From: gailpresley@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Gail Presley <gailpresley@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Monday, April 08, 2019 11:41 AM
To: DEP, NECEC
Subject: NECEC Wildlife Impacts Not Properly Avoided, Mitigated, or Compensated

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Dear Maine Department of Environmental Protection,

I am submitting these comments in opposition to the proposed New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) transmission line. This project will significantly, negatively, and irreparably impact the ecosystem, wildlife and character of the north woods of Maine. It does not offset these impacts, provides no long-term benefits to the state of Maine, and should be denied.

The “North Woods” region of Maine, through which NECEC would pass, is the core of one of the world’s last remaining temperate mixed broadleaf forests and the largest connected forest in the eastern United States. The North Woods allows for the movement of wildlife throughout the Northeast, becoming more important over time as a key pathway for plants and animals to move as the climate changes. Western Maine, where the first 53-miles of the corridor would require entirely new clearing, is of particular importance, as it has been identified as a globally significant Breeding Bird Area; an internationally significant pathway for wildlife between New Hampshire, Maine, Quebec, and New Brunswick; and a resilient landscape that will maintain a diversity of plants and animals even in the face of a changing climate.

NECEC, as proposed, would negatively affect wildlife through direct habitat loss, habitat alteration, and habitat degradation, and by dissecting large, undeveloped and highly connected forest ecosystems and waterways.

I feel strongly that the project and its mitigation plan offer unsatisfactory protections for Maine wildlife. The environmental impacts studies provided by CMP fail to include consideration of one of the project’s major impacts: habitat fragmentation. The 53-mile portion of the proposed transmission line would bisect the natural landscape, which can be a problem for species that need large unbroken blocks of habitat. This portion of the proposed corridor would impact more than 5,000 linear acres of habitat. Some species will be cut off from important pieces of habitat like breeding grounds or high quality feeding areas. Some animals are unable to traverse the opening—think salamanders crossing a dry open right-of-way on a hot summer day—while other species will not cross the opening because it makes them vulnerable to predators.

Fragmentation of forested habitat in particular can have long-lasting effects, and when the fragmentation is permanent like the regularly maintained NECEC corridor would be, it can displace entire populations of interior forest species. This is because the impact of the fragmenting feature can reach far into the forest, affecting otherwise intact, neighboring habitats.

Fragmenting a forest changes the characteristics of the forest that remains. More light is able to enter, allowing different plants to grow. Temperatures, hydrology, and wind speeds change. Open-habitat predators or competitors to interior forest species suddenly have access to these species and their resources. Forest fragmentation from transmission lines also often creates hard edges between forest habitats and early successional habitats rather than a more natural transition from grassland to shrubland to forest. It is estimated that even if a fragmenting feature occurs on only 1% of the landscape, it affects up to 18% of the surrounding area. (Forman RTT and Alexander LE (1998) Roads and Their Major Ecological Effects. Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics. 29(1):207-231).

This project, if approved, will permanently and substantially alter this landscape and its ability to sustain a diversity of species and numbers of individuals over time, while providing no long-term benefits to the citizens of Maine. I oppose this project and recommend denial.

Sincerely,
Gail Presley
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