

The Highlands Challenge

Next week, the state faces a groundbreaking test of its efforts to preserve the Highlands in a smart way that allows the region's economy to continue breathing.

The challenge is to meet two goals at the same time: We need to protect the region against brownouts and blackouts by upgrading a crucial electric transmission line that was built in the 1920s. And we need to forever protect the scenic Highlands, which stretch across the less developed northern regions of the state.

Finding a way to meet both goals is no easy task. But the Legislature foresaw this need when it made provisions to allow utility projects like this in the protected region.

What we've done is to strike that balance. And next week, the Highlands Council is set to vote on our proposal, which is the first of its kind. So let's take a look at the plan, and how we built it.

The first big decision was to stay within the existing right of way where a smaller line already exists. We studied two alternatives. But both would have required losing forested land in the Highlands.

Next came the design. We had to either make the towers taller to hold the new lines, or make the path wider. Again, to avoid losing forests we chose to go higher.

All along, we have made a point to keep our footprint as light as possible. We held public workshops. We met with environmental groups. We pored over maps with the staff of the Highlands Council.

And we listened. We moved a switching station from Jefferson to Hopatcong and used a new technology, moves that will allow us to shrink the footprint by 14 acres.

Still, we acknowledge the project has an impact on the region despite these efforts.

So we established a formula that puts a fair price on land values, and attempts to assess the impact to eco-tourism in the region. We agreed to contribute that sum, just over \$18 million, to the Highlands Council so it can preserve more open space at this critical moment.

The Highland Council's vote is not our final step. Its approval would be contingent on a finding by the Board of Public

Utilities that the new line is needed. That decision is scheduled for the end of the year.

In the meantime, know that we're working to ensure that the lights stay on. And that we're working just as hard to protect the Highlands.



*Keeping electricity
flowing, while
stepping lightly
on the land.*

What's your view? Please let us know at Opinion@PSEG.com.



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