



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **NEWS RELEASE**

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Commission Authorizes Electric Transmission Line Agreement

SOUTHAMPTON, NJ - The Pinelands Commission today authorized its Executive Director , John C. Stokes, to enter into an agreement with the NJ Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to permit the construction of an electrical transmission line improvement project between the Cedar Substation in Stafford Township, Ocean County and the Cardiff Substation in Egg Harbor Township, Atlantic County.

“Today’s Commission’s vote resolves a particularly tough challenge to the protection of important Pinelands natural resources,” said Commission Chairman James J. Florio. “The BPU order demonstrates that there is an indisputable need for this project. This agreement will ensure that the ecological integrity of the Pinelands is preserved, while providing critical public service infrastructure. Further, this will be done in a way that impacts the least number of people and homes of any of the alternatives evaluated.”

On June 15, the BPU issued an order approving the 35-mile route. The proposal is not in strict accord with certain land-use and environmental standards of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP). Specifically, 17.5 miles of the project will be located in the Pinelands Preservation Area and Forest Area Districts, two highly protective Pinelands management zones. However, of that portion, 34 percent will be constructed within existing transmission line rights-of-way. The balance of the project in these areas, with one minor exception, will be constructed within the right-of-way of the Garden State Parkway. The agreement also addresses CMP wetlands standards and takes steps to minimize impacts at wetlands crossings. For example, the minor deviation from the Parkway right-of-way was designed to avoid disturbance of a significant wetlands system in the vicinity of Stafford Forge.

As a result of these inconsistencies, an inter-agency Memorandum of Agreement is required to allow the project to proceed. In accordance with CMP requirements, the agreement provides measures that afford, at a minimum, an equivalent level of protection of Pinelands resources than would be provided through strict application of the CMP’s standards.

“We believe that, given the complexity of this project, an appropriate route has been identified and we are pleased with the agreement that has been reached,” said Stokes. “It maximizes the use of the Garden State Parkway right-of-way, thereby minimizing environmental impacts. It also provides meaningful environmental safeguards to ensure a higher level of protection to Pinelands resources. However, the alignment is not perfect, particularly in Bass River Township, where the BPU, the utility and the Township were unable to identify an acceptable route that fully addressed residents’ concerns.”

BPU Agreement

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The agreement sets forth environmental commitments that must be met, including payment of \$13-million by the utility to the Pinelands Commission to further Pinelands protection programs. The funding will be used for activities that are directly related to the preservation of resources in the area.

In addition, the BPU, the public utility and the Pinelands Commission will work cooperatively to develop a Comprehensive, Ecologically Based Right-of-Way Maintenance Plan for use in all electric transmission rights-of-way located within the Pinelands. The agreement also establishes 30 environmental conditions that must be met during construction of the Cedar to Cardiff line, including measures to protect wetlands, vegetation, threatened and endangered species, as well as historic and cultural resources.

“I want to thank the New Jersey Turnpike Authority for their cooperation with this agreement,” added Stokes. The Garden State Parkway has been nationally recognized for its aesthetic qualities. The Authority’s decision to allow the lines within their right-of-way represents a rare exception to their policy of prohibiting encroachment. That action clearly speaks to the importance of this project to provide secure and reliable electric transmission capacity and to minimize impacts on the Pinelands environment.”

A northern segment of this project, running from Lacey Township to Stafford, received Pinelands Commission approval in April. That segment, presently under construction, did not raise any significant environmental regulatory issues with the Pinelands Commission.

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