Electric Transmission Lines

by Kara Deutsch and Leslie Morlock

Will high-voltage electric transmission lines be built in this park?

The August 2003 blackout that left an estimated 50 million people without power in the Northeast , Midwest, and parts of Ontario has sparked the push for the construction of more high-voltage transmission lines to high-need areas, including New York City, New Jersey, and other densely populated areas of the eastern seaboard. The *Energy Policy Act* of 2005, which called for strengthening of the national electric grid, has provided a means to streamline and expedite the process of approving transmission line proposals via the designation of *National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors* or *NIETCs*.

In August of 2006, the Dept. of Energy released a *Congestion Study* to help identify high energy congestion zones. The National Park Service, citing environmental law and policy contained in the *Organic Act*, *National Environmental Policy Act*, *Wild & Scenic Rivers Act*, *National Historic Preservation Act*, and *Endangered Species Act* (among others), submitted comments to the Department in response to its *Congestion Study* which will guide the Department's final selection of NIETCs. The Northeast Region of the National Park System is faced with at least 8 proposed NIETCs, many crossing through or very near to units of the National Park System. The Dept. of Energy has not designated any route as a NIETC yet, however.

There are currently two proposed corridors that have the potential to impact this park and Upper Delaware Scenic & Recreational River. Of most concern is the *New York Regional Interconnect,* a 190-mile high-voltage direct-current transmission system between central New York and the lower Hudson Valley. This proposed 150-foot right-of-way is currently under review by New York State and crosses Upper Delaware's administrative boundary several times between Hancock NY and Callicoon NY. The second corridor is the *Delaware River Valley Corridor*, proposed for early designation as an NIETC, and including

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regions from western Pennsylvania to Philadelphia, northern New Jersey and New York City. This park has received notice of feasibility studies for transmission lines through the area, but no specific routes have been submitted. Staff at both Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and Upper Delaware Scenic & Recreational River are currently studying the factors involved in designating transmission lines, from policies and processes to siting and building. Coordination with the National Park Service Northeast Region and other park units aims to assure that the national interest in energy corridors does not impact another national interest, that of Americans visiting their parks in a manner "unimpaired, for future generations." ■