

PPL Electric Utilities Seeks Court Order for Access to Federal Land to Perform Vegetation Maintenance on Critical Power Line

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After exhausting all possible alternatives, PPL Electric Utilities has asked a federal judge to allow access to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area so the utility can trim vegetation that threatens the reliability of an existing power line.

"It's unfortunate that we have to take legal action, but this line is a critical part of the electric grid," said David E. Schleicher, vice president-Transmission. "Reliable transmission lines are key to the nation's security and economic health. Keeping trees away from these high-voltage lines is essential to preventing widespread power outages."

The Northeast Blackout of 2003 cut power to 55 million people in eight states and Canada. A tree coming into contact with a high-voltage power line was one cause of that outage, Schleicher said.

PPL Electric Utilities is required to meet strict federal requirements for vegetation management to ensure the reliability of the nation's electric grid. These requirements, enforced by the North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC), include mandatory "clearance" distances from vegetation, and contain stiff financial penalties if electric companies do not comply.

PPL Electric Utilities has valid easement rights that allow vegetation work on the 1-1/2-mile stretch of power line in the recreation area near Bushkill, Pa., Schleicher said. The utility has performed this vital work regularly for many decades without challenge or the need for special permits. This year, recreation area officials initially denied access, then said the company would likely need a special use permit requiring a time-consuming review under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The company filed the action in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania on Tuesday (8/10) seeking an injunction so that the vegetation work can take place in a timely manner.

"We're hopeful that we can resolve this matter quickly and amicably, avoiding additional costs to taxpayers and electricity users," Schleicher said. "It's our obligation, however, to take the actions necessary to maintain our system in a manner that will preserve reliable electric service for PPL Electric Utilities customers -- and for millions of electric customers throughout the Northeast."

PPL Electric Utilities has performed similar vegetation maintenance work this spring and summer on high-voltage transmission lines throughout its 29-county service area.

PPL Electric Utilities Corporation, a subsidiary of PPL Corporation that provides electricity delivery services to about 1.4 million customers in Pennsylvania, has consistently ranked among the best companies for customer service in the United States. More information is available at www.pplelectric.com.

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