

N.J. environmental groups sue Board of Public Utilities over \$750M power line project

By Brian T. Murray/The Star-Ledger

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JERRY MCCREA/THE STAR LEDGER

A 2008 view of PSE&G's transmission line in Montville.

Four New Jersey environmental groups have launched a court challenge against a 146-mile power line proposed between Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey.

The New Jersey Environmental Federation, Environment New Jersey, the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club and the **New Jersey Highlands Coalition** petitioned a state appeals court contending, in part, that the state Board of Public Utilities approved the project in February after simply taking the word of PSE&G and its partner, Pennsylvania-based PPL Electric Utilities, that it was necessary.

The lawsuit contends the BPU failed to fully explore and consider the environmental and secondary impact the project will have on residents and the environment.

"We are asking the courts to do the job that the BPU failed to do," said Jeff Tittel of the Sierra Club. "We don't believe they made a proper alternative analysis ... or that they justified that there is a need. PSE&G said they need more power in the area, but they are selling power to New York."

Public Service Electric & Gas contends the line is necessary to prevent future service disruptions as demand grows.

The lawsuit comes as PSE&G confirmed financial settlements with several towns, including Parsippany, Montville, Byram, Andover, Roseland, Hopatcong, Sparta and Stillwater, that stand in the path of the proposed 500-kilowatt power line. The line will run along an existing 230-kilowatt power line built in the early 1900s through 16 towns in Warren, Sussex and Morris counties, ending in Roseland in Essex County.

PSE&G, says the payments, the amount of which the utility declined to disclose, are compensation for property loss, disruption of natural habitat and other impacts the project may have.

"We are aware that the environmental interveners have filed an appeal. We are preparing to defend against the appeal and believe that there is ample evidence in the record to support the BPU's decision," PSE&G spokeswoman Karen Johnson said.

"PSE&G does not sell power to NY. This project is needed for reliability — period," she said.

The National Park Service must still sign off on the project, which will cut across Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Middle Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River, and Appalachian National Scenic Trail in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.