

Pipeline to Cross NJ...Again

July 19, 2011

In March of 2011, work on the expansion of the Tennessee Gas Pipeline commenced in northern New Jersey's Wawayanda State Park. The pipeline, which will follow the route of the existing pipeline, is slated to widen the clearance of trees an extra 75 feet, expanding the current passage from 50 to 125 feet through 15 miles of state and county park lands. Fifty feet of the 125 will be revegetated after the pipeline is laid, though whether planted trees will ever reach maturity is a question yet to be seriously considered. The affected parks include Ramapo Valley County Reservation, Ringwood State Park, Long Pond Ironworks, and Wawayanda and High Point State Parks. The pipeline is expected to make more than 20 trail crossings along this 15-mile stretch through park land; close to 6 million square feet of land is to be cleared of trees.

The initial pipeline was part of a larger multi-billion dollar project by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co. When first constructed, the state granted the company a 50-foot wide "right of way" through state park land.

Construction of the expanded line is already under way in Wawayanda and is scheduled to continue through the summer. In the meantime, NJ Department of Environmental Protection has set a series of public hearings to establish what mitigation of natural resource damage and public recreation hindrance the company should provide. Construction in other parks will not commence until this series of public hearings is held.

Trail Conference volunteers in the area are concerned that this project will have negative effects on trails that will live long after the inconvenience of temporary closures of popular trail systems, such as the one in Ringwood State Park, where the pipeline will cross trails 10 times. They are asking questions about the lasting environmental impacts that could result from such a large scale expansion: Will there be an increase of erosion at trail-pipeline intersections? What will be the visual impact of permanent clearing of forested lands? Will the project promote the spread of invasive plant species? Will it lead to increased ATV incursions on protected lands?

If you have questions, please consider attending one or more of the hearings listed below. For additional details about what our volunteers have experienced with the construction of the pipeline in Wawayanda State Park thus far, please see the section below entitled "general findings/questions."

Hearing Dates

Thursday, July 28, 2011, 7pm: Bergen County Dept. of Parks will conduct a hearing at the Hampton Inn, 290 Rt. 17S, Mahwah, New Jersey 07430.

Wednesday, August 17, 2011 – 7pm – Montague, NJ – NJ Department of Environmental Protection will hold a public meeting at the Montague Municipal Building, 277 Clove Road, Montague NJ, 07827

Thursday, August 18, 2011 – 7:00pm – Ringwood, NJ - NJ Department of Environmental Protection will hold a public meeting at the Ringwood Municipal Building, 60 Margaret King Avenue, Ringwood, NJ 07456

General Findings/Questions

1. The pipeline appears to cross New Jersey trails more than 20 times; project access roads co-align (i.e. overlay) trails for several miles.

2. In Wawayanda State Park, where pipeline construction has already commenced, areas where the pipeline intersects trails have been impassable for 5-6 months, shutting down hiking loops, patron accessibility to parking lots, and Trail Maintainer accessibility to their trails.
3. How will such trail closures affect the remainder of state and county park trails? Will entire sections of these parks be shut down?
4. Will annual events on such trails, including but not limited to bike and trail running races, Scout trips and hiking club outings be cancelled.
5. The South-North passages of the long distance Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Highlands Trail will be cut in two, preventing thru-hikers from reaching their destinations. How will these trails be kept open and safe during construction?
6. Will construction increase ORV/ATV access to protected park lands and impact each trail along the pipeline's route? (If massive construction vehicles are accessing the pipeline route throughout the parks, why wouldn't ATV users be emboldened to do the same?)
7. How do they intend to prevent water flowing down the steep grades the construction will leave from intersecting and eroding our trails? (Water will eventually travel off the pipeline route and onto the trails it intersects unless efforts are made to prevent it.)
8. How will the spread of invasive plant species be prevented or how will they be responsibly removed and monitored?
9. The crew will be crossing several bridges on access roads; these bridges are not built to sustain the heavy traffic of the crew's machinery. How do they plan to remedy this? One bridge is historic (1882 bridge off 202 and Bear Swamp Road).
10. Bear Swamp Road and many interior woods roads and trails will be used by construction crews as access roads. These roads are in bad condition and will be in worse condition afterwards. .
11. Will construction prevent access to BSA Camp Yaw Paw? Bear Swamp Road is used to get to the camp.
12. The aesthetic impact will be long lasting, leaving the landscape and many trails scarred for years to come without the possibility of reroutes due to the pipeline/s length across entire park? What is the plan on funding scenic rehabilitation?

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