



## PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

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Julie A. Smith and Christopher Lawrence  
Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability  
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Dear Ms. Smith and Mr. Lawrence:

The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) was founded in 1972 to promote and protect the Virginia Piedmont's rural economy, natural resources, history and beauty. Headquartered in Warrenton, Virginia, PEC has offices throughout a nine county Piedmont region that includes Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties in Virginia. It is actively engaged in energy policy issues at the local, state and federal level. PEC works with citizens to conserve land, create high-quality communities, strengthen rural economies, celebrate historic resources, protect air and water quality, build smart transportation networks, promote sustainable energy choices, restore wildlife habitat, and improve people's access to nature.

PEC submits the following response to the draft Integrated, Interagency Pre-Application (IIP) Process published by Notice from the Energy Department on August 29, 2013 (the Notice).

Based upon the questionable proposition that there has been an unnecessary delay in approvals of electric transmission projects, on March 22, 2012 President Obama issued an Executive Order directing federal agencies to seek ways to streamline the approval process for infrastructure projects. As quoted in the Notice, the President called on executive departments and agencies to “encourage early collaboration among agencies, project sponsors, and affected stakeholders in order to incorporate and address their interests and minimize delays...”

The August 29, 2013 Notice sets out as its goal to “enhance early communications and coordination; enhance public engagement and outreach; develop early iterative feedback on routing options and alternatives; promote predictability; and ultimately to reduce the time required to reach a decision to approve or deny a project while also ensuring compliance with environmental laws.”

It is the view of the PEC that the proposal meets some of these goals and falls short on others.

**Enhance early communications and coordination.** The IIP does an admirable job of enhancing the communications and coordination between the Project Proponent and Federal Entities. The meeting proposed in the Notice would serve to involve Federal agencies early and often in the siting process. However, since other bodies beyond Federal, State and Tribal governments have knowledge of federally managed resources, the communications and coordination efforts appear to be unduly limited. Many organizations have well-established connections with and unique knowledge of identifiable federal resources.<sup>1</sup> The IIP limits the input during the early phases of project planning to Federal, State and Tribal governments. If the goal is to enhance communications it would seem that reaching out to a larger group would better accomplish that goal. Moreover, because there are communities and people in the areas near to the federally managed resources, the public outreach contemplated by the IIP should begin contemporaneously with the early meetings rather than waiting up to 120 days after the Initial Meeting.<sup>2</sup>

**Enhance Public Engagement and Outreach.** The proposal falls remarkably short in its response to this goal. For instance, the Public Outreach and Tribal Coordination plans appear geared towards announcing a result rather than seeking input before final decisions have been made. Furthermore, the outreach appears to involve the Project Proponent rather than the Federal agencies. Importantly, it appears to reduce public involvement at this stage to little more than a “check box” that the Project Proponent must mark off at a Study Corridor Meeting. As there is no opportunity for the public to make its concerns known to the federal agencies who will be working with Project Proponents how does this input inform the Federal Entities of legitimate concerns help by the public *vis a vis* affected federal resources.

**Develop Early Iterative Feedback.** The IIP proposal fails to include the public and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which could provide valuable feedback at this early stage of project development. The IIP proposal provides ample opportunity for feedback between agencies and project sponsors, and even permits involvement by “Non-Federal Entities,” but it leaves out a large segment of “the stakeholders” who will be impacted by the proposed electric transmission projects—the public. At the very least there should be an opportunity for NGOs to register geographic areas of interest with the Department of Energy (DOE) so that they may be involved in the pre-application process. Many of these NGOs have specific and detailed knowledge of areas that may be impacted by proposed projects. Their early involvement in the process has the potential to alert both Project Proponents and the DOE of constraints that should be addressed in the pre-application process. This involvement could be accomplished with a pre-filing by NGOs of areas of interest. Once a pre-application process is initiated the DOE and Project Proponent should initiate a meeting with the NGOs to exchange information on the impact on resources.

**Promote Predictability.** The number of electric transmission line projects that have been rejected due to federal agency action is vanishingly small. In that sense this proposal, or no change in federal policy, will continue predictability.

**Reduce Time.** The goal of any policy, whether initiated by the government or private industry, should be to make a good decision. To set the simplistic goal of making a quick decision does not serve the interests of the public. The resources that will be affected by the siting of non-marine high voltage transmission lines crossing jurisdictions administered by a Federal Agency are public resources. High voltage

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Civil War Trust, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Shenandoah National Park Trust, C & O Canal Association to name a few just in or near the northern Virginia Piedmont.

<sup>2</sup> Paragraph IV A. “Within 60 days after the Initial Meeting, unless otherwise agreed upon, the Project Proponent will be required to submit a draft Public Outreach Plan...DOE, in consultation with the Federal Entities, will coordinate and provide DOE and the Federal Entities’ feedback to the Project Proponent within 60 days.”

transmission lines represent an industrial intrusion on what are often fragile historic, cultural or wilderness resources. These places are held by the government in trust for benefit of public at large. It seems a curious exercise of that trust to emphasize a hasty decision to compromise those resources, rather than to carefully consider the impact of industrial development upon them.

For these reasons The Piedmont Environmental Council recommends that the IIP be amended to include a greater involvement by the public at this early stage of project consideration.

The Piedmont Environmental Council

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