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PSE&G Mitigation Plan Approved

If proposed Susquehanna-Roseland project is approved, Highlands Council will require PSE&G to move switching station, implement mitigation measures and pay for land preservation

CHESTER, N.J. – The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council voted today to approve a Highlands Act Exemption application submitted by PSE&G's for the proposed Susquehanna-Roseland 500-kV Transmission Line project. As a part of the application, PSE&G proposed a comprehensive mitigation plan to protect and enhance the resources of the Highlands Region.

PSE&G is proposing to upgrade the transmission line through the 26-mile existing right-of-way in New Jersey's Highlands Region. The Board of Public Utilities is expected to rule in December as to whether the utility upgrade is needed.

"This action by the Highlands Council ensures that if the project receives approval from the BPU, it will include a comprehensive mitigation plan that will protect the resources of the environmentally sensitive Highlands Region," Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart said. "It is the role of another state agency to determine the need for the utility upgrade, but we must ensure, as we have today, that if this utility upgrade goes forward, harm to the resources of the Highlands Region will be minimized to the extent possible and that mitigation will be provided for any unavoidable impacts."

The Council vote means that the protections of the Highlands Act and the Regional Master Plan will apply to the project along its entire 26-mile existing right-of-way, in both the Planning and Preservation Areas.

The Comprehensive Mitigation Plan proposed by PSE&G and approved by the Highlands Council today includes the relocation of a switching station from Jefferson Township to a site in Hopatcong Borough. In addition, PSE&G has agreed to construct a smaller station utilizing Gas Insulated Switching gear technology. The relocation to Hopatcong Borough means that there will be less

environmental impact and that a total of 11 fewer towers will have to be constructed. The amended proposal also includes new management plans, consistent with NJDEP permit requirements, for work in forested, wetlands and critical habitat areas; a restoration plan for streams and riparian habitats; and a historic and archaeological resources protection plan. Lastly, the CMP includes a contribution by PSE&G of \$18.6 million toward the acquisition or stewardship of priority lands in the Highlands Region consistent with the Regional Master Plan goals for eco-, agri- and heritage tourism.

PSE&G's first proposal for the project was considered by Council staff to be inconsistent with the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act in December 2008. In response, PSE&G requested additional time to work on the issues identified by the Highlands Council. After PSE&G's submission of the revised project and the CMP, the Highlands Council accepted a new round of public comments. More than 100 comments were reviewed by the Highlands Council staff and a revised consistency determination and a summary of comments and responses were posted on the Highlands Council website at <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/projectreview>. The exemption approved today is contingent upon the BPU determining need for the project.

If need was established by the BPU and the applicant did not receive the exemption determination, the project would have been required to obtain a Highlands Preservation Area Approval from the NJDEP, which would have required Highlands resource protections only for the Preservation Area.

“Our responsibility was to determine consistency with the goals and purposes of the Act and to guarantee that the Highlands Resources get the highest protections possible across the entire project area,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said. “The mitigation plan submitted by PSE&G addresses the concerns raised during our initial review.”