

Power Lines or Pristine Forests?

Yale owns vast tracts of forestland in New Hampshire and Maine through Bayroot LLC.¹ Originally much of this land served as timber investments for Yale.² More recently, Yale's investment manager has used this land to develop a series of controversial wind farms. Now, after plans for another wind farm failed due to insufficient transmission capacity, it has leased a portion of this land for the development of a high-voltage transmission line that faces objections from environmentalists.

Yale's Interest in Northern Pass:

Northern Pass is a proposed 192-mile high-voltage transmission line that two large utility companies, Eversource Energy and Hydro-Quebec, are developing. The \$1.2 billion project will connect hydroelectric power from Canada to New Hampshire and New England.³

The developer has leased land from Yale-owned Bayroot LLC that would allow for 24 miles of the transmission line to be laid through Coös County. The lease ends in 2017, and Eversource has an option to extend it for 98 years. Despite calls from environmental groups to bury the line, the lease allows the line to be built above or below ground,⁴ and the lease provides the option for the construction of a Wind Farm, which could be developed by a third party including the manager of Bayroot LLC.⁵

Any wind farm that could be constructed on the land owned by Bayroot, LLC will require greater transmission capacity in Coös County. Wagner Forest Management manages the land owned by Bayroot, LLC and Tom Colgan is the President and CEO of Wagner. He has acknowledged that Wagner conducted studies for a 180-megawatt wind farm in the area, but these plans stalled in 2010 due to a lack of transmission capacity.⁶ In a different instance, he suggested that the developers of the transmission line that would bring energy from Hydro-Quebec could subsidize the transmission upgrades that would be necessary to construct additional wind farms in Coös County.⁷ A representative from Eversource Energy⁸, also noted that there could be "synergies" between transmission upgrades in Coös County and the Transmission line that it was proposing to develop.⁹

Yale has an interest in Northern Pass's success, and Tom Colgan has advocated for the project. He testified in favor of the project and argued against burying the transmission line on Bayroot, LLC's property in testimony to the US Department of Energy.¹⁰ He has sought official intervenor status for the hearing with New Hampshire's Site Evaluation Committee.¹¹

Environmental Controversy and Opposition:

Although the project benefits Yale, it has been fiercely opposed by New Hampshire residents and many environmental groups. A poll of New Hampshire adults taken in May 2016 found more people in New Hampshire opposed the project than supported it.¹² Many environmental groups that are generally advocates of renewable energy oppose this project. They are among 64 environmental and civic groups, many local municipalities, local businesses, and local NGOs that have raised objections to the project.¹³ Many of these groups are major conservation and recreational groups such as the Appalachian Mountain Club¹⁴, the Connecticut River Watershed Council¹⁵, the Conservation Law Foundation¹⁶, the Nature Conservancy¹⁷, RESTORE¹⁸, the Sierra Club¹⁹, and the Wilderness Society²⁰.

Critics argue that the route will damage pristine forests in the Great North Woods and the White Mountains, fragment recreational areas, and threaten wildlife.²¹ In the Dartmouth Review, a student college expressed concern that the project will diminish a land grant that the state of New Hampshire gave to Dartmouth in 1807.²² Environmental advocates challenge the idea that the power source is clean and note that the dams could negatively affect riverine ecosystems. They contend that there are many alternatives, such as burying the transmission line or upgrading existing lines, that would provide similar amounts of clean energy without causing as much environmental harm.²³

Silencing First Nation Voices:

The Pessamit Innu First Nation of Quebec is also opposed to Northern Pass, and filed a petition to intervene in New Hampshire's Site Evaluation Committee hearings. In their petition to intervene, they cited concerns about environmental harm and infringements to their rights. Northern Pass prevented the Pessamit from participating in the hearings with official intervenor status²⁴ by objecting to the Pessamit's petition to intervene.²⁵

Relationship with Yale:

Yale owns 98.8% of Bayroot LLC, which has leased land to the developers of Northern Pass.²⁶ Wagner Forest Management manages this land for Yale and has been actively pursuing energy projects in New Hampshire and Maine.

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