

Appalachian National Scenic Trail
Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail
Monongahela National Forest
West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland

Newsletter 1
June 2010

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Baltimore District



The Applicants (PATH Companies)

- PATH Allegheny Transmission Company, LLC
- PATH Allegheny Virginia Transmission Corporation
- Potomac Edison Company
- PATH West Virginia Transmission Company, LLC

The Agencies

- National Park Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



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PUBLIC SCOPING BEGINS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR POTOMAC-APPALACHIAN TRANSMISSION HIGHLINE (PATH) RIGHT-OF-WAY APPLICATIONS

The National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are seeking public comment to help develop an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a project that would affect several national park system units and a national forest.

Federal agencies must assess environmental and social impacts, under the National Environmental Policy Act, before making decisions that could affect the environment. Scoping is the first step and is the time when agencies and the public identify issues that should be considered and begin to define alternatives. The scoping process is initiated by publishing a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register. In addition, federal agencies must consider potential effects on historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. These activities will be conducted concurrently, beginning with the scoping process.



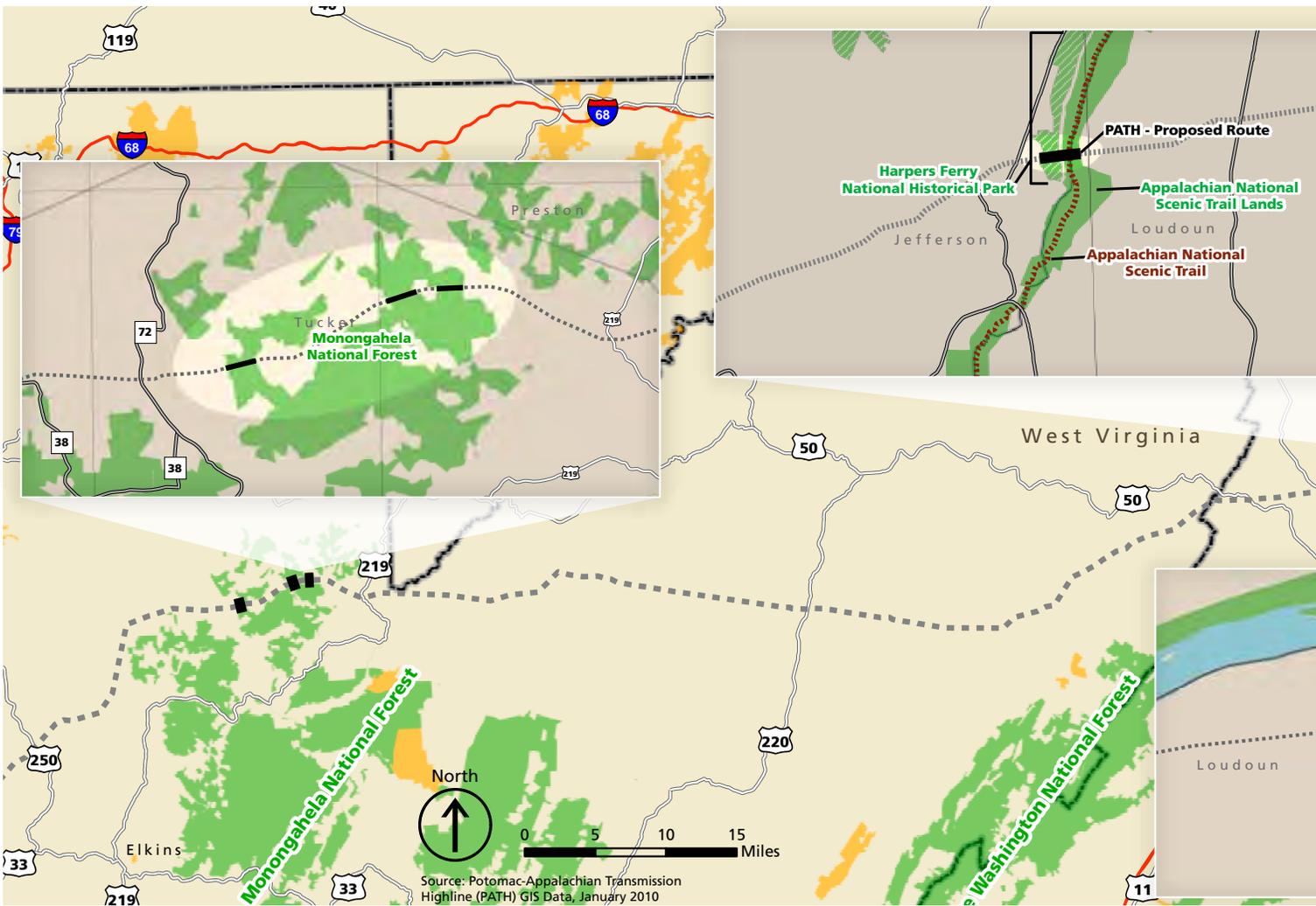
The first of several opportunities for the public to comment is during the public scoping comment period, which begins with the Notice of Intent and extends a minimum of 15 days after the public scoping meeting. The agencies will hold the first of a series of public meetings in July 2010 to discuss the project and to receive input from interested parties. More information about upcoming public meetings and other ways to participate throughout the process can be found on the last two pages of this newsletter.

WHAT IS THE PATH PROJECT?

A group of electrical transmission companies (collectively referred to as the "PATH Companies" or "Applicants") proposes to construct a new 765-kV electric transmission line that would run across 276 miles of West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland.

In May 2009, the PATH Companies applied for construction and right-of-way (ROW) permits from the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service to cross 2.5 miles of the following federal lands:

- Four national park units in the vicinity of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (WV)
 - Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (NHP)
 - Appalachian National Scenic Trail (NST)
 - Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park (NHP)
 - Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (NST)
- The northern portion of Monongahela National Forest in Tucker County, WV



Proposed PATH Transmission Line Route through Federal Lands

HOW WOULD THE APPLICANTS' PROPOSAL AFFECT FEDERAL LANDS?

On NPS lands, the Applicants have requested permits to expand the width of existing transmission line ROWs. The existing ROWs are approximately 0.34 mile long at Harpers Ferry NHP/Appalachian NST and approximately 0.07 mile long at Chesapeake and Ohio Canal NHP/Potomac Heritage NST.

The Applicants' proposal could also involve upgrading existing local roads to access the transmission line corridors during construction and maintenance of new transmission-line towers.

On USFS land, the Applicants' proposed route would require clearing a new 200-foot-wide ROW through approximately 2.1 miles of Monongahela National Forest. Access roads and staging areas for construction materials and equipment also could be constructed in the forest.

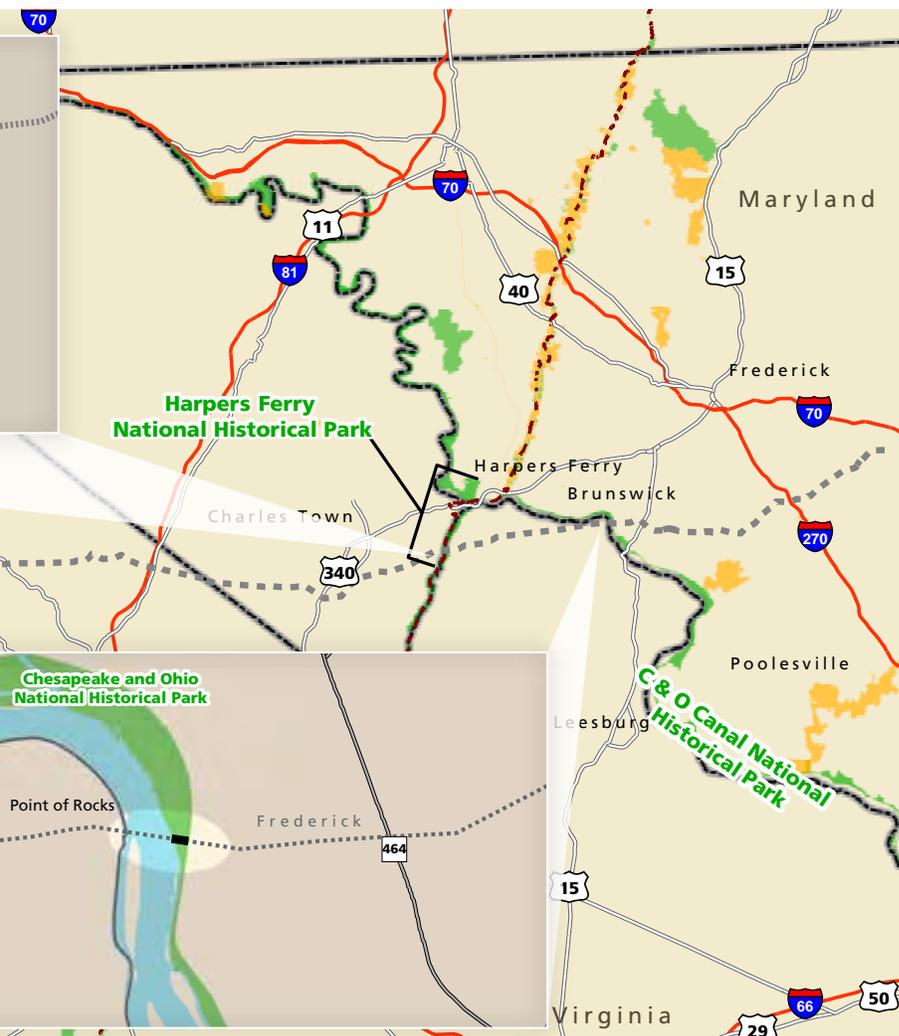
PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The federal action that will be considered in this EIS is the Applicants' proposal that the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service grant the requested construction and ROW permits.

Federal action is needed because the Applicants have submitted the required applications to the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service in accordance with applicable laws and NPS and USFS regulations.

These agencies therefore have a duty to consider whether and with what conditions, if any, to issue the requested permits. In doing so, the agencies must consider the purposes and resources of the affected national park system units and the national forest, as expressed in statutes, regulations, and policies.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a cooperating agency because of their role in evaluating permit applications for construction activities that occur in the nation's waters, including wetlands.



WHAT WILL THE EIS EVALUATE?

The agencies are preparing an EIS to evaluate the Applicants' proposal and other possible alternatives. The agencies will use the EIS to determine if they will:

1. Issue the permits requested by the Applicants to cross federal lands
2. Issue the requested permits with conditions, or
3. Deny the permits

The EIS will focus on those areas where the PATH project could cross federal lands. The EIS will not evaluate the entire 276-mile transmission line corridor or alternative means to address the Applicants' stated need for the PATH project.

That evaluation and review is the responsibility of other agencies: primarily the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the state public service commissions, and the state environmental agencies.

PATH PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Applicants' stated purpose for construction and operation of the PATH project is to strengthen the electrical transmission grid for reliability purposes, at the direction of the regional transmission organization. PJM Interconnection, LLC oversees the overall movement of wholesale electricity throughout a region comprising all or parts of 13 states and the District of Columbia.

PJM's Regional Transmission Expansion Plan has identified projected reliability concerns that the proposed PATH project is designed to alleviate and has directed construction of a line of sufficient capacity to address these violations.

The proposed 276-mile PATH project would run from the existing Amos substation near St. Alban's in Putnam County, West Virginia to a new, proposed Kemptown substation near New Market in Frederick County, Maryland.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PARKS AND THE FOREST



HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

The view of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers at Harpers Ferry inspired Thomas Jefferson to say it is “worth a voyage across the Atlantic” and still is enjoyed by visitors today. The Harpers Ferry NHP had approximately 250,000 visitors in 2008.

Harpers Ferry witnessed the first successful application of interchangeable manufacture (in firearm production at the federal armory established by George Washington in 1796), the arrival of the first successful American railroad, John Brown’s attack on slavery in 1859 that helped precipitate the Civil War, the largest surrender of Union troops during the Civil War, and one of the nation’s first institutions of higher learning for freed slaves.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/hafe>



APPALACHIAN NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

The Appalachian NST is a continuous, 2,175-mile footpath running along the crest line of the Appalachian Mountains. Approximately 2 million visitors use the trail each year, for trips varying from afternoon hikes to 5-month treks of the entire Georgia-to-Maine length.

The Appalachian NST is significant because of the many natural, scenic and cultural resources that are protected along the length of the trail.

It is managed cooperatively by the National Park Service, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, volunteers from 30 local Appalachian Trail clubs, the U.S. Forest Service, and the 14 states through which it runs.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/appa>



CHESAPEAKE & OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal operated from the 1820s to the 1920s to transport coal, lumber, grain, and other products from western Maryland to the port of Georgetown and to the navigable lower reaches of the Potomac River.

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal NHP is unique because it is virtually unbroken throughout its 184.5-mile length and has not been substantially changed since its construction, with hundreds of original locks, lock houses, and aqueducts remaining.

Today, the canal’s towpath still provides a nearly level, continuous trail through the spectacular scenery of the Potomac River Valley. In 2008, 3 million visitors came to hike or bike the towpath.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/choh>



POTOMAC HERITAGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

The Potomac Heritage NST is an 830-mile system of locally managed trails, extending from the mouth of the Potomac River to the Allegheny Highlands and running through Virginia, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

The Potomac Heritage NST system includes the entire 184.5-mile length of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal NHP and provides access to a number of national historic sites.

The Potomac Heritage NST is significant for its network of trails for recreation, education, and transportation that connect people to the natural environment and to the local history and culture.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/pohe>



MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST

Monongahela National Forest consists of approximately 919,000 acres in the north central highlands of West Virginia. Approximately 1.1 million people visited Monongahela National Forest in 2006. Monongahela National Forest is one of the most biologically diverse national forests in the country; it contains the headwaters of six major river systems, including 95% of West Virginia’s coldwater fisheries. This National Forest provides timber, water, grazing, and minerals, as well as a wide range of recreation opportunities, habitat for wildlife, and unique ecological and wilderness areas.

Website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf>

ISSUES

Internal discussions by the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service identified a number of physical, natural, cultural, socioeconomic, operational, and other resources that potentially could be affected by the proposed PATH ROWs on federal lands.

Biological Resources

- Rare, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species
- Wetlands
- Habitat fragmentation and wildlife
- Invasive species



Physical Resources

- Geology and soils
- Water quality
- Floodplains
- Air quality
- Climate change/ greenhouse gases



Cultural Resources

- Archeological resources
- Historic properties
- Cultural landscapes
- Ethnographic resources



Social and Economic Resources

- Visitor use and experience
- Viewsheds, scenic views and visual resources
- Soundscapes and noise
- Local community impacts
- Environmental justice

Park and Forest Operations

- Park and forest staff
- Partners and volunteers
- Timber, mineral, and other resource use
- Special uses



You can help by identifying any additional issues and resources that should be considered.

OBJECTIVES FOR ISSUING PERMITS

The agencies have begun developing objectives related to the project issues. The project team will use the issues and objectives to help develop a range of reasonable alternatives. Reasonable alternatives are those that would meet NPS and USFS missions and goals, while also meeting the purpose and need for federal action.

Biological Resources

- Avoid or minimize impacts on threatened or endangered species or their habitat. If impacts are unavoidable, mitigate adverse effects, and complete and implement Endangered Species Act Section 7 and state consultation
- Avoid, minimize, or carry out other mitigation for:
 - Adverse impacts on species of special concern or their habitat
 - Adverse impacts on migratory birds in accordance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act
 - Introduction and spread of invasive species
- Ensure that Monongahela National Forest Management Indicator Species habitat objectives are achieved and that the Regional Forester Sensitive Species do not trend towards federal listing
- Maintain the ecological integrity and prevent degradation of rare communities
- Protect existing land use and habitat against potential fragmentation by minimizing or otherwise mitigating impacts, consistent with the Monongahela National Forest Plan and NPS policy
- Protect existing functions and values of wetlands, floodplains, and other water resources so that adverse impacts will be avoided, minimized, or otherwise mitigated

Physical Resources

- Avoid, minimize, or carry out other mitigation for adverse impacts on geologic, paleontological, and soil resources

Cultural Resources

- Avoid, minimize, or carry out other mitigation for impacts on the integrity of known or discovered cultural resources that are listed or potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places

Social and Economic Resources

- Avoid, minimize, or carry out other mitigation for adverse impacts on:
 - Scenic resources and viewsheds
 - Visitor experiences
 - Recreational opportunities
- Avoid constructing or altering park, forest, or community roads in such a manner that surrounding land use is adversely affected



Park and Forest Operations

- Avoid, minimize, or carry out other mitigation for adverse effects on NPS and USFS operations, including those of partners and volunteer organizations
- Protect the health and safety of NPS and USFS employees, volunteers, and visitors during construction activities



You can help by commenting on objectives for granting the requested ROW permits.

THE EIS WILL CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES

The EIS will compare different ways that the proposed project could cross federal lands to determine which alternatives would minimize impacts to the natural, scenic, cultural, recreational, and human resources within and adjacent to the national park system units and the national forest.

Alternatives will be developed after receiving public input at the scoping meetings in July 2010 and will be presented for public feedback in fall 2010. The draft EIS will describe the range of alternatives that were evaluated in detail and may identify a preferred alternative.

The following alternatives, at a minimum, must be evaluated:

The no-action alternative

- For NPS lands, “no action” means that the National Park Service would not grant permits to cross the national park units as proposed by the Applicants. Existing power lines running through the parks would remain. The Applicants would have the opportunity to submit a modified permit application for consideration.
- For Monongahela National Forest, “no action” means that the U.S. Forest Service would not grant access to cross the forest. The Applicants would have the option of constructing the transmission line outside of Monongahela National Forest.

The alternative proposed by the Applicants

- A new ROW corridor through Monongahela National Forest
- Expanded ROWs through the Appalachian NST, Harpers Ferry NHP, and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal NHP/Potomac Heritage NST.



You can help by making comments and suggestions about these and other reasonable alternatives that (1) would meet the Purpose and Need for federal action and (2) could minimize impacts to resources within the national park units, the national forest, and adjacent areas.

Other alternatives might (or might not) include, for example,

- Keeping transmission line construction within the existing ROWs
- Allowing transmission line construction with a reduced ROW width for selected crossings
- Alternative crossings of federal lands
- Engineering or construction modifications that could minimize impacts on federal lands.

YOUR PARTICIPATION WILL HELP SHAPE THIS EIS



Your knowledge and participation are vital to the planning process. By sharing your opinions about the project and what you value about these four national parks and the national forest, you can make a difference in the eventual outcome.

The public scoping meetings and scoping comment period are just the first of several milestones when your input is especially needed. The project schedule (on page 7) shows the formal opportunities to comment.

The public scoping meeting and the public alternatives meeting will focus on sharing current information and receiving direct public input on the task at hand, but the scoping process essentially continues until the Draft EIS is prepared.

At this step in the EIS process, it would be most useful if you would provide your thoughts on resources and issues that should be evaluated in the EIS and potential alternatives that could minimize impacts to park and forest resources while meeting the purpose and need for federal action.

For your comments to be most useful in developing the draft alternatives that will be presented and discussed in fall 2010, please submit your comments by **August 5, 2010**.

All comments will be included in the administrative record file that the agencies will use to reach a decision. Please include your full name with your comments. Anonymous comments will not be considered. If you would like to be added to our mailing list, please include your mailing or e-mail address.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address or other personal information in your comment, however, you should be aware that your entire comment—including personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. We will always make comments from representatives or officials of organizations or businesses available in full for public inspection.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

Public meetings are open to everyone and provide an opportunity to learn more about the proposed project. In July 2010, the agencies will hold public scoping meetings in four locations. The locations and dates are shown on the last page of this newsletter.

The July scoping meetings will be open houses, lasting from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. You can drop in at your convenience, get the information that interests you, and stay only as long as you want. Maps and displays will provide information about the proposed crossing of federal lands by the PATH project and about the EIS process. NPS and USFS staff will be there to answer your questions and listen to your comments. If you wish to submit detailed comments at these meetings, you can speak to a court reporter or fill out a comment form.

How to provide your comments:

- Attend one of the public meetings
- Visit our web site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/appa>
- Mail your comments to:
National Park Service
Attention: PATH EIS Planning Team
Denver Service Center–Planning
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225

Project Schedule

July 2010	Public Scoping Meetings
September/October 2010	Public Meetings on Range of Alternatives
Summer 2011	Draft EIS and Public Meetings
Fall/Winter 2012	Final EIS and Record of Decision

Public comments and questions are welcome at any point in the EIS process.



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YOU'RE INVITED!

This newsletter includes information about a proposed transmission line project that would cross Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, and Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail in the vicinity of Harpers Ferry, WV, and would cross the northern portion of the Monongahela National Forest in Tucker County, WV.

Because of your interest in your national parks and national forest, we are requesting your input in developing the environmental impact statement for the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH) Right-of-Way Applications. We encourage you to attend one of these public scoping meetings and to stay involved in the project as it progresses.

DATES AND LOCATIONS OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

July 19, 2010

4:00–8:00 p.m.
Quality Inn Conference Center
4328 William L. Wilson Freeway
(US 340)
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

July 20, 2010

4:00–8:00 p.m.
Loudoun Valley High School
340 North Maple Avenue
Purcellville, VA 20132

July 21, 2010

4:00–8:00 p.m.
Tuscarora High School
5312 Ballenger Creek Pike
Frederick, MD 21703

July 22, 2010

4:00–8:00 p.m.
Tucker County High School
US 219, between Parsons and
Davis, WV 26269

Additional public meetings will be held in fall 2010 to review and ask for public comments on the range of reasonable alternatives identified for evaluation in the environmental impact statement, and in summer 2011 to hear public comments on the draft environmental impact statement.