

A Measured View of the Northern Pass

The proposed Northern Pass transmission project (NPT) has raised questions as to how it will affect the state's scenic resources. As NPT engineers develop designs for the line, they are working with LandWorks to determine how the NPT will actually fit within the New Hampshire landscape.

LandWorks is an award winning landscape architecture and planning firm that works throughout Northern New England and New York, with a special focus on scenic resource management and protection. LandWorks has worked on behalf of citizen groups and municipalities, public and private utilities and energy development companies, as well as the states of Maine and Vermont.

LandWorks has developed several visual simulations for NPT. The veracity and quality of these simulations were recently called into question. NPT has also been criticized for the lack of any comprehensive visual impact analysis or assessment (VIA). The fact is that a VIA is underway and when fully developed it will be presented. VIA's are not typically initiated and completed until the route and structure design options are fully developed. It is unfortunate that some have criticized the review and analysis process conducted by Northern Pass without sufficient information or perhaps a complete understanding of the visual assessment process.

LandWorks approaches every project with an objective perspective: the firm neither supports nor opposes any project it works on. We employ accepted methodologies and applicable state and federal standards in visual assessment to evaluate the potential impacts to scenic and aesthetic resources. Some of the methods used by LandWorks to conduct an objective and comprehensive visual impact study include:

- Viewsheds are first generated using GIS software to ascertain where the

project may potentially be visible.

- Extensive field work supplements the understanding of where the project will be seen from, and to what extent. LandWorks is staffed with avid outdoors-people, members of the AMC and other conservation and environmental organizations. Employees spend extensive time in the field hiking the Appalachian Trail, visiting key historic and cultural resources, analyzing various locations and vantage points to document, understand and assess the nature and extent of potential visibility.
- Visual simulations are developed using field work and software designed to reflect the exact view, coordinates, scale, shading and coloration of the object(s) being simulated. Visual simulations provide a representative sampling of locations from which the project can be seen. They often depict “worst case” views – how the project might look like from sensitive and highly valued locations such as trails and summits, as well as places where they may be readily visible, such as road crossings. A variety of times of day are also used as projects in New England are viewed in a range of weather, seasonal, and daytime periods.
- The complete VIA will also incorporate the techniques and practice for scenery assessment outlined by the United States Forest Service Scenery Management System, and will reference the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The analysis will incorporate a scenic attributes assessment and gauge the effect on typical viewers and recreational users in the national forest, state parks and conservation areas, as well as other cultural heritage sites.
- Finally, the VIA will address the design and siting of the corridor and structures to determine whether there are suitable mitigation measures to reduce the potential for visual impacts.

Ideally, interested parties will reserve judgment until the full analysis is complete to ensure the project gets a fair hearing. Once the analysis is presented, the public will have an opportunity to truly examine whether this project can be successfully accommodated within the New Hampshire landscape.

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