

DOE turns down Northern Pass comment extension request by NH delegation

By DAVE SOLOMON - New Hampshire Union Leader May 12, 2015

The Department of Energy has turned a deaf ear to a request by the New Hampshire Congressional delegation to extend the comment period on the Northern Pass environmental impact statement (EIS). On April 8, the state's two senators and two representatives in Congress jointly signed a letter to Assistant Secretary of Energy Patricia Hoffman in anticipation of a draft EIS being issued sometime this spring or summer.

The EIS is required to assess the potential environmental impacts of the plan to bring hydroelectric power from Quebec into New England on high-voltage power lines through New Hampshire. The draft, subject to public input, is expected to contain approximately 2,000 pages of material. "We respectfully request that all public hearings be scheduled at least 90 days after the release of the draft and that public comments be accepted for at least 90 days after the final public hearing," the lawmakers wrote. On April 28, Hoffman responded with a polite "no." "DOE plans to provide at least 60 days for public review of the draft EIS, which exceeds the minimum required comment period of 45 days," she wrote.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Works, the union representing trade groups in support of the Northern Pass project, wrote to the DOE on April 14, objecting to the request for delay. "Considering the current challenges faced by the New England energy market, IBEW finds this request unreasonable," the union wrote. "To further delay this and other proposals by implementing unnecessarily long public comment periods further impacts our state's economy and working families.

"Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Kelly Ayotte, along with representatives Ann McLane Kuster and Frank Guinta, fired off a response to Hoffman's decision on Friday, urging her to reconsider. "We strongly believe that New Hampshire residents deserve ample time to review, understand and comment on this complex project," they wrote. "The 60-day comment period is insufficient." Guinta said he does not intend to back down. "I am disappointed in the Department of Energy's rejection of this common sense request," he wrote in an email. "The DOE owes it to Granite Staters to provide an opportunity to thoroughly review their environmental impact statement.

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