



June 7, 2024

Ref: 52978.00

Amanda Barker-Jobin, Wetlands Bureau
New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services
29 Hazen Drive, PO Box 95
Concord, NH 03302-0095

Re: Response to Request for More Information – Standard Dredge and Fill Wetlands Permit Application
X178-1 Transmission Line Rebuild Project – Campton, Thornton, Woodstock, NH

Dear Amanda:

On behalf of Public Service Company of New Hampshire d/b/a Eversource Energy (Eversource), VHB has prepared the following responses to comments provided by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES), dated May 10, 2024, in association with the Standard Dredge and Fill Wetlands Permit Application (Wetlands Application) for the Eversource X178-1 Transmission Rebuild Project (project) in Campton, Thornton, and Woodstock, NH, NHDES File Number 2024-00475. Italicized comments from NHDES below are paraphrased and followed by responses from VHB and Eversource. An updated set of Wetland Permitting Plans is provided as Attachment 1 that incorporates many of the comments and responses described below. Other attachments are included as described below.

NHDES Comment 1: Basic Application Requirements

- a. In accordance with Env-Wt 311.01(b)(1), as the DataCheck identified areas of concern relative to protected species or habitat, provide the current status of coordination with the NH Fish and Game Department (NHF&G) for rare or protected animal species and habitat to determine how to avoid and minimize project-related impacts on the resource. Further coordination is required between the Applicant, NHDES and NHF&G regarding time of year restrictions for conducting work in wetlands for the protection of wood turtles (state species of special concern).

Response: The NH Fish and Game Department (NHF&G) provided final rare species recommendations on March 1, 2024. This information was also communicated to NHDES by NHF&G, but is also provided at Attachment 2 for reference. The NHF&G recommended permit conditions have been incorporated into the current Wetland Permitting Plan sheets and notes provided in Attachment 1. These recommendations include time of year (TOY) restrictions, for matting placement for protection of wood turtles, and monitoring of contractors.

- b. As required by General Condition #8 of the General Permit (GP), and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), applicants must consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to ensure all authorized activities will not adversely affect properties listed on, determined to be eligible for listing on, or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, including



previously unknown historic sites within the project area. Please indicate the status of the review by NH Division of Historical Resources and their request for a Phase 1B.

Response: Eversource has contracted AECOM to perform archaeological and historical cultural resources surveys for the project. A Phase 1B archaeological investigation was approved by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) and one sensitive archaeological site will be avoided. Above ground architecture and historical resource surveys and coordination with NHDHR is ongoing. The final NHDHR responses will be forwarded to NHDES when received.

- c. ***In accordance with Env-Wt 311.06(j), if seeking to be covered by the state general permits, provide a statement of whether comments have been received from any federal agency and, if so, how the comments have been addressed.***

Response: Eversource communicates regularly with the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE, or Corps) regarding their transmission line maintenance projects, including this project. Eversource and VHB will be providing the ACOE specific forms and mapping for consultation in the Corps' Pre-Construction Notification (PCN) permitting process. The ACOE will also be provided information related to the NHDES wetland permitting process. The Corps' attended the NHDES virtual pre-application project meeting on January 18, 2024. No other federal agencies attended the pre-application meeting. VHB utilized the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool to review federally listed species that may be present within the project area, and prepared a Biological Analysis for the Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), Tricolored Bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*), and Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), which indicated a "Not Likely to Adversely Affect" determination for each species. VHB submitted this analysis to USFWS on May 20, 2024. Eversource and VHB will be submitting an electronic Notice of Intent (eNOI) for the Construction General Permit with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and typically does this about two or three weeks prior to construction. Additionally, the project coincides with a small section of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) in the Town of Woodstock. A NEPA Categorical Exclusion (Decision Memo) is currently in review with the United States Forest Service (USFS). No specific comments from federal agencies have been received.

- d. ***The information regarding the presence of suitable habitat for turtles is inconsistent between the Functions and Values Data Sheets, locations identified on the Application plans and Attachment G: Turtle Overwintering Habitat Assessment Memo. Please clarify this information.***

Response: During coordination with NHF&G, suitable turtle habitat was discussed and clarified on March 1, 2024 (See Attachment 2). The final locations of these habitats and associated Best Management Practice (BMP) plan notes based on NHF&G recommendations are shown in updated Wetland Permitting Plans (Attachment 1).

The discrepancies between the Functions and Values Data Sheets, locations identified on the Application plans, and Attachment G: Turtle Overwintering Habitat Assessment Memo are due to the fact that the Data Sheets and Attachment G Memo were completed and submitted with the Standard Dredge and Fill Application on February 22, 2024, which was prior to completion of the coordination with NHF&G and receipt of NHF&G Permit Conditions on March 1, 2024. The updated Wetland Permitting Plans include the areas of potential wood turtle overwintering habitat consistent with areas identified by NHF&G during its review of the project to develop specific permit conditions related to turtle habitat, as well as all the NHF&G Permit Conditions. The Functions



and Values Data Sheets have been updated to be consistent with the updated Wetland Permitting Plans, and only include wetlands which will be impacted by construction activity. The stream and wetland areas associated with potential wood turtle overwintering habitat include:

- Mad River and associated wetland W-14 (no impacts to river or wetland),
- Stream Channel (SC) 19, associated with wetland W-30 (temporarily impacted by matting) and wetland W-30A (not impacted)
- Mill Brook and associated with wetlands W-57 and W-58,(Mill Brook not impacted, both wetlands temporarily impacted by matting),
- Stream Channels 35 and 35A, associated with wetland W-72 (temporarily impacted by matting),
- An unflagged off-ROW vernal pool, associated with wetland W-96 (not impacted), and
- Vernal pools 17 and 18, associated with wetland W-102 (temporarily impacted by matting, and permanently by the structure replacement within the wetland).

Revised Functions and Values Sheets include Wetlands 30, 32/33, 37, 57, 58, 72, 82, 88/89, 99, and 102. Functions and Values sheets are also provided for the temporarily impacted wetlands along access roads that were delineated subsequent to the initial Wetlands Application, which includes Wetlands 7A, 8A, 145A, 145B/145C, and 145D/E. In addition, the Additional Wetland Information Table has been revised to include the wetlands that were mapped after the Application submittal. See Attachment 3 for the revised and new Functions and Values Sheets and updated Additional Wetland Information Table.

NHDES Comment 2: Need/Avoidance and Minimization

- a.* Please provide documentation on the status of any proposed alternative access locations. Has permission been granted or denied in any of these locations since filing the application? How does that change the proposed wetland impacts?

Response: See table in response to Comment 2b below for current status of active off-ROW access locations. The updated Wetland Permitting Plans now show access road locations that have property owner agreements in place as black dashed lines. Those where access was denied have been deleted from the plans.

- b.* Please provide a table for each alternative access location showing the difference in wetland impacts if access is granted or denied so that permitted wetland impacts can be clearly identified.

Response: Please see the table below of off-ROW locations and associated changes in wetland impacts, if present. The avoidance measures have reduced wetland matting in some locations, while in others there have been increases, reflecting the fact that some wetlands were identified along critical off-ROW access roads, and in one location within the ROW, which would need to be temporarily impacted by matting. As noted below, there are several off-ROW access roads for which landowner agreements are still be sought, therefore the total amount of temporary impact will likely need to be modified again pending finalization of the agreements. Also included in the table are locations where access roads have been removed from the Wetland Permitting Plans where agreements could not be obtained with landowners.



Map Sheet	Off-ROW Access Road (new structure number)	Description	Provides Wetland Avoidance?	Reduction of Wetland Impact?
1	NH Route 175 to Structure 1.	Agreement in place. Provides critical access to structure near substation.	Yes, avoids additional in-ROW temporary impacts to Wetland W-1.	N/A, avoidance included in Wetlands Application.
2	NH Route 175 to Structures 2 through 7.	Agreement in place. Provides critical access to ROW as access by substation is constrained.	N/A	N/A
2	Off-ROW access between Structures 7 and 8.	Agreement in place. Provides critical access to avoid steeply sloped stream/wetland valley by crossing stream at higher upland elevation.	Yes, Avoids in-ROW temporary impacts to Wetland W-4.	Yes. Reduces temporary impacts by 4,015 SF to Wetland W-4.
3	NH Route 175 to Structures 10 to 14.	Agreement in place. Provides critical access points for equipment across very uneven terrain in ROW with steeply slope stream/wetland valleys. Access is necessary for complex work at Structure 14. Wetlands delineated along this access road since time of initial application.	N/A	No. Use of this critical access road would result in additional temporary impacts of 1,534 SF to Wetland W-7A and 1,132 SF to Wetland W-8A.
4	Sunset Circle to Structures 17 to 20.	Existing rights to established access route.	N/A	N/A
4, 5	Southmayd Street to Structures 22, then along access road to communications tower to Structures 28, 29 and ahead.	Pending agreement. Provides critical access to ROW on existing access road to cell tower to avoid very steep slope between Structures 26 and 27.	N/A	N/A
6	NH Route 175 to Structures 40 and 41.	Pending agreement. Provides access to ROW to avoid steep hill between Structures 39 and 40. Additional wetland developed in vicinity of	N/A	No. Unavoidable temporary impacts of 9,249 SF and 60 SF of permanent impact to Wetland W-27A are



		Structure 40 since original delineation, due to large amount of water being directed to ROW from adjacent properties.		associated with the matted work pad and structure installation.
7,8	NH Route 175 to Structures 52 through 54.	Pending agreement. Provides critical access to Town-owned property (capped landfill) through which existing ROW crosses.	N/A	N/A
8	NH Route 175 to Structures 56 to 57.	Pending agreement. Provides critical access to ROW to avoid fencing across ROW at edge of Town landfill between Structure 54 and 55.	N/A	N/A
8	NH Route 175 to Tame Road to Structures 58 and 59.	Pending agreement. Provides additional access for complicated work at angle Structure 58.	N/A	N/A
9	NH Route 175 to Structure 61 and 63.	Pending agreement. Provides 2 additional access points to ROW.	N/A	N/A
9	Off-ROW access road between Structures 59 and 60.	Pending agreement. Critical access would avoid new crossing of steep stream valley by crossing stream off-ROW at existing crossing.	Yes, would avoid in-ROW temporary impacts of 915 SF to Wetland W-30.	Pending
10, 10A, 10B	NH Route 175 to Old Sawmill Road to Structures 73, 74 and ahead.	Pending agreement. Provides critical access to ROW for long stretch of 8 structures and would negate need for in-ROW access at Sunrise Hill Road (residential area).	Yes, would avoid temporary impact of 4,126 SF to Wetland W-40 and avoid spanning of streams SC-21 and SC-26.	Pending
12	Steel Bridge Road to Structures 83 through 85	Pending agreement. Provides critical access to ROW and avoids resources near Mill Brook by negating need for access from Covered Bridge Road.	Yes, would avoid temporary impacts of 4,892 SF to Wetland W-57.	Pending



15	NH Route 175 to Barnard Road to Structures 109, 108, 107 and 106.	Agreement in place. Provides additional critical access point to ROW along long stretch of structures	N/A	N/A
16	NH Route 175 to Structure 111.	Agreement in place. Provides direct access to the structure.	N/A	N/A
16	NH Route 175 to Structure 114.	Agreement in place. Provides critical access to the structure.	Yes, avoids temporary impacts to Wetland W-87.	N/A, avoidance included in Wetlands Application.
17	NH Route 175 to Roma Road to Structures 117, 118.	Agreement in place. Provides critical access to ROW and avoids impacts to PRA (floodplain wetland). Roma Road access route added to updated plans.	Yes, avoids impacts to W-91 (DES PRA).	Yes, avoids temporary impacts of 2,948 SF to W-91 (DES PRA).
17	Alternative access between Structures 118 and 119 had short section off-ROW.	Unable to reach agreement with landowner. Off-ROW access road shown on initial application plan sheet has been removed.	N/A	N/A
17	NH Route 175 to ROW between Structures 119 and 120.	Pending agreement. Provides critical access point to ROW for complex construction at angle Structure 120. New access road added to updated plans; old route removed from plans.	N/A	N/A
18	NH Route 175 to Structures 122, 123.	Pending agreement. Provides 2 critical access points to both sides of NH Route 175 to avoid steep slopes within ROW.	N/A	N/A
19	NH Route 175 to Structure 129.	Pending agreement. Provides critical access to ROW for long stretch of 7 structures.	N/A	N/A
19	Sellingham Road to Structures 130, 131.	Agreement in place. Provides critical access points to ROW as there are steep slopes between Structures 129 and 130 to west of Structure 130 and avoids impacts to wetlands.	Yes, avoids temporary impacts to Wetland W-114.	N/A, avoidance included in Wetlands Application.



19	NH Route 175 to Structure 133 and ahead.	Pending agreement. Provides critical access point to ROW for long stretch of 15 structures.	N/A	N/A
21, 22	Tripoli Road to Avery Farm Road to Structure 141	Unable to reach agreement with landowner. Off-ROW access road shown on initial wetland application plans has been removed.	N/A	N/A
23	End of Cox Farm Road to Structure 163	Agreement in place. Provides critical access point to ROW along existing access road as there are very steep slopes, uneven terrain, boulders and bedrock within ROW. The existing access road location and wetlands were delineated since submittal of the initial application.	N/A	No. Use of access road results in unavoidable temporary impact of 885 SF to Wetland W-145.
23	End of Cox Farm Road to Structure 159	Agreement in place. Provides critical access point to ROW along existing access road as there are very steep slopes, uneven terrain, boulders and bedrock within ROW. The existing access road location and wetlands were delineated since submittal of the initial application.	N/A	No. Use of this access road results in unavoidable temporary impacts of 1,558 SF to Wetland W-145A, 1,045 SF to Wetland W-145B, 1,085 SF to Wetland W-145C, 1,640 SF to Wetland W-145D, and 1,243 SF to Wetland W-145E.

- c. *Env-Wt 521.05(a)(1) states that in addition to the design and construction requirements in Env-Wt 300, utility projects shall be designed to avoid and minimize construction access over, or work in or upon, organic soils. Please provide information regarding the presence of very poorly drained soils and soils with high organic content (histosols and histic epipedon). The Application plans show shading for very poorly drained soils in locations that are not identified as wetlands (Sheets 12 and 19). The Application plans do not indicate any proposed impacts to wetlands with very poorly drained would or histosols and histic epipedons. Is that correct? If impacts are proposed to the above-described resource areas, please describe the specific design elements and proposed construction methods and timing to meet the requirement for these wetlands.*

Response: The Wetland Permitting Plans in Attachment 1 have been updated to provide clarity to the mapping of very poorly drained soils (VPDs), which include histosols and soils having histic epipedons. The permitting



plans submitted with the application showed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) mapped soils as brown shaded areas. The brown shading has been removed and replaced with a polygon line, with a label added for the mapped soil series name. For this project, the areas of NRCS very poorly drained soils are quite limited. In addition, brown stippling has been added to wetlands atop the green shading, and now show areas that may have VPDs that could be encountered during construction. This is based on a review of delineation data and does not imply that all portions of these wetlands designated as such contain 100% very poorly drained soils. Conversely, other wetlands are not mapped by NRCS as having VPDs, but field observations noted that portions of these wetlands did contain some areas of VPDs. In these cases, these wetlands are also designated with brown stippling. Also, note that site specific soil mapping was not conducted in the field, nor is it required by NHDES Wetlands Rules. Proposed construction methods in the wetlands listed above and in all histosol and histic epipedon wetlands with organic soil content are the same as construction methods in wetlands with mineral soil content and are intended to minimize ground disturbance as much as possible in all wetlands. Eversource proposes to place temporary timber matting in both mineral and organic soils to minimize and prevent rutting and compaction in wetlands. This is the only feasible and safe method for access to replacement structures within wetlands. Typically, runners are placed first on the wetland surface, followed by sections of matting in 4-foot by 16-foot increments, often built up in multiple layers to provide flat and stable access and work surfaces. The temporary matting will be removed upon completion of work and stabilized with weed-free straw. Due to the size of the project area, large scope of work, and the locations of these wetlands spread out across the length of the transmission line ROW, restricting work to certain times of year or weather conditions is not feasible. A restoration and monitoring plan (see response to Comment 5c below) has been developed and will also be followed in these wetlands.

- d. *Env-Wt 521.05(b) states that construction access or work shall be prohibited in PRAs unless the work: (1) Is authorized as an SPN or a project type exception under Env-Wt 407; or (2) Causes only temporary impacts; (c) All project activities shall be performed, located, constructed, and maintained in accordance with the Utility BMPs. Please describe how the proposed project has been designed specifically to prevent permanent impacts to PRA W-91 and how any necessary work conducted in this area will be conducted in accordance with the Utility BMP.*

Response: As described below in our response to Comment 2b., above, and Comment 3e., below, the access road that was previously shown on the application plans to provide access across PRA W-91, will not be used and has been removed from the updated Wetland Permitting Plans. No impacts to PRA W-91 will occur.

- e. *In accordance with Env-Wt 313.03(b)(6), for any major or minor project, the applicant must demonstrate that the project avoids and minimizes impacts to floodplain wetlands that provide flood storage. Given the importance of floodplain wetlands, the construction sequence referenced in "d" above, should include methods to ensure that the work in the PRA identified above is done under frozen conditions, per Env-Wt 313.03 and Env-Wt 521.05(a)(1), (b)(2), and (c) or other proposed means of avoiding impacts, such as using specialized equipment, and or the use of helicopters.*

Response: Wetlands W-14, W-54F, and W-57, W-112 are considered flood plain wetlands as they are located within mapped 100-year floodplains. Other than W-57, a small portion of which would be temporarily impacted by matting (if the desired off-ROW access route from Steele Bridge Road cannot be agreed upon with the



landowner); none of these wetlands would be impacted by the project. Also, Wetlands W-90, W-91, W-100, and W-102 are considered floodplain wetlands as they are located within the 100-year floodplain adjacent to a Tier 3 stream. As stated above, impacts to Wetland W-91 will be avoided, therefore the mapped PRA is avoided. In addition, Wetlands W-100 and W-102 are considered turtle overwintering habitat and therefore matting is not allowed to be placed during frozen conditions.

- f. ***Please clarify the proposed stream crossing methods. The Application states on page 7 that cribbing may be required for stream crossings. The Application plan detail on page C2.4 depicts a rock ford crossing. However, the Application plans only depict temporary crossings using timber mats that span the streams.***

Response: Wetlands W-54A and W-156 are the only two locations where permanent rock fords are proposed. As currently planned, all streams will be temporarily spanned with matting for access thereby avoiding stream impacts.

NHDES Comment 3: Location Specific Avoidance and Minimization: Based on the current information and in accordance with Env-Wt 521.05(a)(2), Env-Wt 521.03(c), Env-Wt 313.03 and Env-Wt 311.07(b)(3) demonstrate that potential impacts to jurisdictional areas have been avoided to the maximum extent practicable and that any unavoidable impacts have been minimized by specifically addressing the following:

- a. ***Plan Sheet 10. Is it possible to remove the access path off Sunrise Rd to proposed structure 72, and access proposed structure 72 only from Old Sawmill Rd and proposed structure 73? This would avoid impacts to W-40 and SC-21.***

Response: Eversource is in negotiation for a permanent access agreement with the owners of the property (Benton) through which Old Saw Mill Road traverses. Eversource anticipates receiving approval for use of Old Saw Mill Road, which would therefore avoid impacts to W-40 and SC-21. NHDES will be notified if this occurs.

- b. ***Plan Sheet 12. Please explain the rationale for having the proposed off-ROW access path to proposed structures 82 and 83 coming off Steele Bridge Rd. It is less impacting to have the access to proposed structures 82-85 from Covered Bridge Rd. This avoids further impacts to W-54A, SC-28, SC-28A, and SC-28B.***

Response: Eversource is in negotiation for a TAP with the owners of the property (Noseworthy), over which the access road from Steel Bridge Road traverses. During the course of reviewing access to the ROW for construction, in light of minimizing impacts to wetland and stream resources to the maximum extent practicable, it was determined that access to the ROW from both Steel Bridge Road and Covered Bridge Road was necessary to support access for construction. However, during additional discussion with construction personnel, it was determined that access from Covered Bridge Road can be avoided if approval of access from Steel Bridge Road is obtained from the landowner.

Although accessing the ROW from Covered Bridge Road would avoid resource impacts associated with access from Steel Bridge Road as noted by NHDES, Eversource and VHB note that the avoidance of wetlands in the ROW near the Covered Bridge Road access point, i.e., W-56 and W-57 would be preferable as these wetlands are more intact, i.e., fully grown vegetation, and with less disturbance than W-54A, SC-28, SC-28A, and SC28B



which are located in areas that were cleared of trees during recent logging activities on the Noseworthy property. Furthermore, the small amount of permanent wetland and ephemeral stream impacts that are proposed on the Noseworthy property are necessary to correct and stabilize the unstable surface of the existing logging road and the wetland that is crossed by it, that would be used for access to the ROW to a location between proposed Structures 82 and 83. However, it may be possible to avoid the majority of the impacts to this road by using the more northerly access road that leads to a location just north of Structure 83, the use of which would involve only a small permanent wetland impact of 604 SF versus 965 SF of wetland impact and 130 LF of ephemeral stream channel from the route that runs perpendicular to the ROW. Eversource is still engaging in discussions with the landowner for an access agreement is going to propose this concept to the landowner. As noted in the Application narrative, the current conditions on this property, including the ROW that crosses it, reflects the recent logging activities resulting in a greater amount of water running off the cleared hillside located to the east of the ROW. The water continues flowing across the ROW and forms the ephemeral stream channels SC-28, SC-28A and SC-28B within the ROW, and then back onto the off-ROW portion of the Noseworthy property. The added runoff water has enhanced the hydrology and expanded the wetland within the ROW (based on prior data from more than 10 years ago.) These channels are formed in open logging tire ruts and provide little to no function compared to Mill Brook and adjacent wetlands W-56 and W-57, which are undisturbed, fully vegetated, and provide greater functions and values.

c. Plan Sheet 13. Can the proposed access road be shifted easterly to reduce impacts to W-64?

Response: Unfortunately, this change cannot be accommodated due to the steep slopes, boulder-strewn surface and bedrock outcropping that is present within the eastern portions of the ROW near W-64 and Existing Structure 84. Due to the difficult terrain, the structure must be accessed from the higher elevation flatter terrain in the western side of the ROW as shown on the plans and Photo 1, below. The steep terrain and bedrock outcroppings extend within the ROW to the north, east and south of the structure and cannot accommodate an access road without a significant amount of earthwork. See Photo 2, below. In addition, the location of the road within the ROW shown on the plans is the location of the existing access road which was used previously.



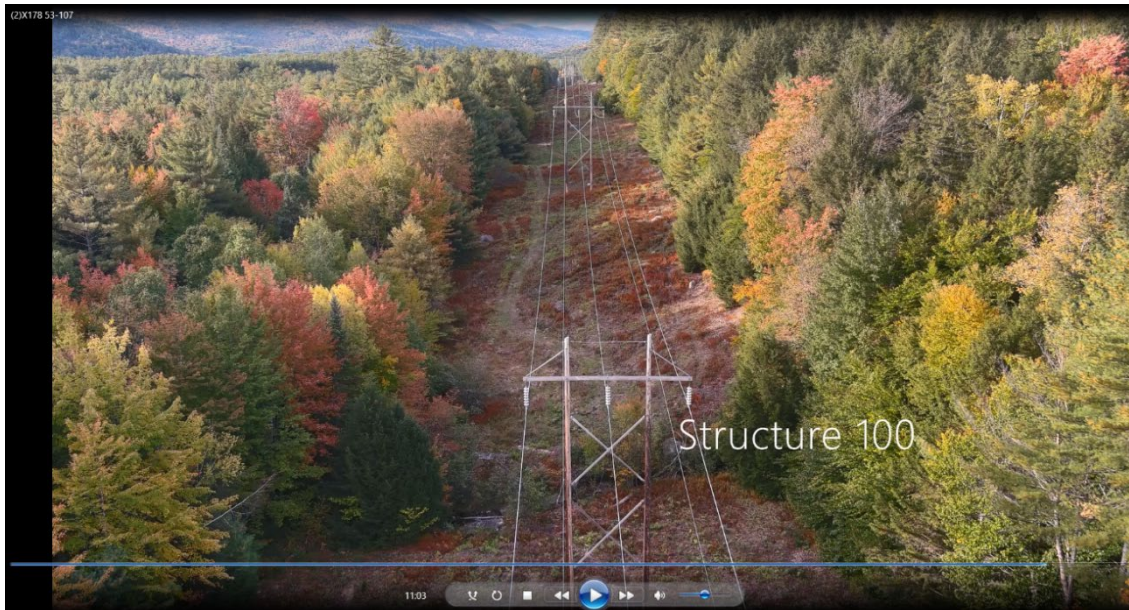
Photograph 1: View east of existing structure 84 and relatively flat terrain on the western side of the ROW in foreground.



Photograph 2: View north of very steep, boulder-strewn terrain, with exposed bedrock immediately south of existing structure 84 along the eastern edge of the ROW.

d. Plan Sheet 15. Can the proposed access road be shifted easterly to reduce or eliminate impacts to W-82?

Response: Unfortunately, this change cannot be accommodated due to the steep slope and boulder-strewn surface that is present within the ROW in the location between Existing Structures 100 and 101. Shifting the road as requested would require a significant amount of earthwork and is not practicable. As seen in the screen capture from aerial drone footage (See Photo 3, below), an existing ATV access road (trail) extends from Barnard Road along the western edge of the ROW. The construction access would follow this same route. Although the image shows that past access suggests there may have been vehicular access running diagonally across the ROW to the eastern edge, it was determined during construction field reviews that in order to accommodate the necessary construction equipment, a significant amount of earthwork would be required to cut a road into the steep slope along the eastern edge of the ROW (which has an uneven, boulder-strewn surface between Structures 100 and 101) and then across Hackett Brook, which flows at a steeper gradient with higher stream banks in this location compared the western edge of the ROW, where the stream crossing is shown on the Wetland Permitting Plans.



Photograph 3: View north of the ROW, Existing Structure 100 in foreground, and Hackett Brook and W-82 just beyond the structure.

- e. ***Plan Sheet 17. Please remove the access path between proposed structure 116 and 117 and access structure 117 via off-ROW access path off Rt. 175 and Roma Rd. This avoids impacts to the PRA floodplain wetland identified as W-91.***

Response: As requested, the access road between Proposed Structures 116 and 117 has been removed, thereby avoiding 2,948 square feet of temporary matting impact to the PRA floodplain wetland W-91. A new off-ROW access road section was added that extends construction access from the gated access point at Roma Road to the ROW, then continuing off the ROW, then back to the ROW at a location to the south of Proposed Structure 118. No wetland impacts would occur from use of this additional access road. In addition, a previously proposed road segment located along the eastern edge of the ROW, which then goes off-ROW for a short segment and then back to the ROW was removed as the landowner did not want to allow use of this road which would have required tree clearing to make it passable for construction vehicles. See attached updated Wetland Permitting Plans.

- f. ***Plan Sheet 17. Is it possible to move the access path that goes through wetlands identified as W-99 and W-100? Why are there two access roads here?***

Response: Unfortunately, this change cannot be accommodated due to removal of the aforementioned access road along the eastern edge of the ROW due to the lack of an access agreement with the landowner. Access is necessary across this portion of the ROW as shown between the structures due to the complicated nature of the construction associated with the corner (angle) structure located to the north, i.e., Proposed Structure 120.

g. Plan Sheet 17. Are there any additional avoidance and minimization measures that can be employed for W-102 and VP-17? Possibly time of year for completing the work?

Response: Eversource understands the importance of the natural resources present in this location, i.e., the wetland, stream, and vernal pool complex (W-102 and VP-17), as well as potential wood turtle habitat. Eversource's contractors will be adhering to the time of year restrictions requested by NHF&G and NHDES, as well as biological monitoring of this area, and will review the proposed work plans with the chosen contractors to determine if construction can be accomplished outside of the active vernal pool season. Due to the fact that Proposed Structure 120 is an angle structure, it is an inherently more complicated construction location, and, unfortunately, the work pad cannot be reduced in size as construction equipment will need to access the structure from all sides during various stages of construction.

h. Plan Sheet 18. Please provide the need for impacting W-109. Can the proposed access road be shifted westerly?

Response: Unfortunately, the requested change to avoid W-109 cannot be accommodated due to the steep slope, bedrock outcroppings, and bouldery surface that is present within the ROW immediately to the west of the access road and along the eastern edge of the ROW. As can be seen in the screen capture from aerial drone footage (Photograph 4, below), to access Existing Structure 120, the access road is located between these limiting landscape features. The narrow seep wetland W-109, which cannot be avoided, is located within the existing access road that was previously used, and which traverses the steep slope in a necessary meander formation, i.e., from one side of the ROW to the other, to avoid the bedrock outcrops and bouldery areas.



Photograph 4: View north of ROW between Existing Structures 119 (foreground) and 120 (in the distance). Bedrock outcrops and boulders can be seen south of 120.



NHDES Comment 4: Application Plans:

- a. *Please amend the Application plans to include a reference to the specific restoration sequence for each wetland type, to return wetlands to their original conditions with the same elevation and vegetation species per Env-Wt 307.11(j) and Env-Wt 307.12(i).*

Response: The restoration plan described in the response to Comment 5 b. below has been added to the updated Wetland Permitting Plans Notes on Page C1.3.

- b. *Please include the wildlife sweeps to be conducted by environmental monitors in the Construction Sequence on the Application plans.*

Response: NHF&G permit conditions related to wildlife sweeps have been added to the Construction Sequence Notes on Page C1.0 of the updated Wetland Permitting Plans.

NHDES Comment 5: Restoration and Mitigation:

- a. *The Applicant proposes an in-lieu fee payment to the Aquatic Resource Mitigation (ARM) Fund as mitigation for proposed permanent wetland impacts in accordance with Env-Wt 313.04(a). NHDES requires in-lieu fee payment for permanent impacts prior to commencement of the permitted work in NHDES jurisdiction. After-the fact accounting is not consistent with this requirement. The final payment amount is based on the approved wetland impacts and may require revising the ARM Fund Spreadsheet. NHDES Wetlands Mitigation program staff are being kept informed during the processing of this application.*

Response: Compensatory mitigation is proposed for permanent wetland impacts associated with the drilling disturbances and backfilling of new structures within wetlands. In addition, permanent impacts associated with the direct filling of wetlands due to the addition of stone for access (Wetlands W-54, and W-156) and vernal pool 9 (due to its location surrounding an existing wooden pole) are unavoidable as explained previously within the Application, and are compensated for by payment into the ARM fund. If necessary, a separate mitigation proposal will be submitted once additional landowner agreements are in place, and/or following completion of the project and the results of the proposed temporary matting tracking and reporting. The table below provides a summary of the permanent wetland impacts by town to be compensated for by payment into the ARM fund. The total amount proposed for payment into the ARM Fund is \$14,913.50. The ARM Fund worksheets are included as Attachment 4.

Town	Permanent Wetland Impact (SF)	Permanent Wetland Impact ARM Fund Payment Calculation
Campton	80	\$383.28
Thornton	1,322	\$6,301.72
Woodstock	1,786	\$8,228.50
Totals	3,188	\$14,913.50



b. *Env-Wt 307.12(i) states that unless otherwise authorized, wetland areas where permanent impacts are not authorized shall be restored to their pre-impact conditions and elevation by replacing the removed soil and vegetation in their pre-construction location and elevation such that post-construction soil layering and vegetation schemes are as close as practicable to pre-construction conditions. Please provide a specific restoration sequence for all temporary wetland impact area types that achieves compliance with this requirement.*

1) Restoration plan should include a provision that if matting or regrading after mat removal creates significant disturbances to the wetland surface, a native seed mix approved for wetland conditions will be spread on the disturbed soils, Wetmix (New England Wetland Plants, Inc.) and weed-free straw mulch spread to stabilize the area in accordance with Env-Wt 307.12(f), Env-Wt 307.12(g).

2) Temporary impact areas are required to have at least 75% successful establishment of vegetation after two growing seasons or be replanted and re-established until the area becomes re-established in accordance with the approved plans.

3) Monitoring shall be conducted by a certified wetland scientist or qualified professional for annual inspections for no fewer than 2 years following the first growing season after completion of the project, with annual reporting requirements to DES.

4) Monitoring shall be conducted by a certified wetland scientist or qualified professional for annual inspections for 5 years following the first growing season after completion of the project for impacts to PRAs and organic very poorly drained soils, with annual reporting requirements to DES in accordance with Env-Wt 803.04(b)(1). This includes documenting pre-impact conditions relative to the wetland's hydrologic regime, level of soil compaction, vegetation species, scope of aerial coverage, wetland function, habitat and soils elevation.

Response: A restoration plan has been developed for the project and is included below. The restoration plan has also been added to the updated Wetland Permitting Plans on Notes Page C1.3.

Eversource will monitor wetlands where timber matting has been removed. Photographs will be taken of each wetland within 30 days of the last mat being removed. If rutting, compaction, or other disturbances to the wetland surfaces are observed during mat removal, these areas will be restored. As necessary, the wetland restoration sequence is as follows:

- Re-grading of the wetland surface, either with hand tools or lightly with mechanized equipment, to match the surrounding undisturbed wetland areas and closely match the original condition and elevation of the wetland. This will occur concurrent with mat removal activities, if disturbances are observed, so that restoration areas can be reached from other matting as restoration progresses outward from the interior portions of wetlands.
- Temporary disturbances to wetland vegetation from matting are anticipated, as mats block sunlight and can damage plants. If little to no ground disturbance (rutting, soil displacement or compaction) occurs from matting, it is expected that the vegetation will not be significantly disturbed and should regenerate with no further action. If matting or regrading after mat removal creates significant disturbances to the wetland surfaces, seed and mulch may be needed to stabilize the area.



- At mat removal and restoration areas where exposed soils are observed, stabilization with a weed-free straw mulch will occur to prevent erosion and sedimentation within the wetland. The contractors performing mat removal will have weed-free straw bales available during the mat removal process so that the mulch can be spread as exposed soils are created and/or encountered.
- It is expected that the wetland soils contain a seed bank that will regenerate naturally, but supplemental seeding may be necessary to expedite stabilization. If seeding is determined to be necessary, a native seed mix approved for wetland conditions will be spread on the disturbed soils, such as New England Wetmix (New England Wetland Plants, Inc.), and will not contain invasive or non-native plant species.
- In accordance with the Corps guidance, soil samples will be assessed from previously matted wetland areas via auger and/or tile spade shovel (sharp-shooter) to document that hydric soils remain in the wetland based on the definitions in the Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Northcentral Northeast Region- Version 2.0 (Regional Supplement). Hydrophytic vegetation will also be evaluated using the methods identified in the Regional Supplement to determine if the Rapid Test, Dominance Test, or Prevalence Index are met and areas contain less than 5% areal coverage of invasive and other unacceptable plant species. If matting is removed during winter, and ground conditions (frozen ground, deep snow) prevent accurate identification of hydric soils and hydrophytic vegetation, this data may be collected during the next growing season.

Upon completion of construction and restoration, a post-construction monitoring report will be prepared and provided to NHDES within 90 days following completion of the project. The report will include:

- The final mat tracking table showing the dates of mat installation and removal at each wetland.
- A description of how the project implemented the described restoration plan and any notable observations of significant wetland disturbance and the methods used to restore those disturbances.
- Photographs of matted areas in individual wetlands following completion of mat removal and restoration with comparison to before and during construction photographs as appropriate.
- Recommendations regarding additional remedial actions (additional seeding, stabilization, etc.) or additional monitoring efforts, if necessary.

An environmental monitor will conduct bi-annual (twice per year; approximately June and September) site inspections of previously matted wetland areas for the first two full growing seasons after the completion of mat removal. A report summarizing the observations made during the inspections, including photographs, will be provided to NHDES by December 15 each year. This proposed monitoring and report process will be conducted by or under the supervision of a New Hampshire Certified Wetland Scientist (NHCWS). If required, additional ARM Fund mitigation fees will be calculated based on NHDES and ACOE permit conditions and recommendations and based on the impacts described in the final report. Should restoration be achieved before the end of the 2-year period, reports demonstrating such restoration will be provided to NHDES, and monitoring will be concluded upon receipt of confirmation from NHDES.



NHDES Closing Comments re: Public Hearing, Response Time, and ACOE Coordination

Eversource acknowledges that the project includes more than one acre of temporary wetland impact, and a public hearing is planned for June 21, 2024. This response to the RFMI is being submitted for inclusion in the public hearing.

Eversource is committed to keeping the general public informed about work occurring within their communities. In support of this project, Eversource has been conducting extensive outreach with project abutters, municipalities, and the general public. A project website has been developed to keep the public informed of project progress leading up to and during construction <https://www.eversource.com/content/residential/about/transmission-distribution/projects/new-hampshire-projects/beebe-river-to-whitefield-line-rebuild-project>. This website will be updated on a regular basis during construction and includes project mapping and work locations.

Eversource and VHB will continue to consult with the ACOE through the NHDES wetland application process and provide them with materials, as necessary. A PCN application is anticipated to be submitted to the ACOE in July 2024. The Corps is also copied on this communication.

Regards,

VHB

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacob Tinus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "T".

Jacob Tinus, CWS, CPESC
Senior Environmental/Energy Specialist/Project Manager

Attachments: Attachment 1 – Updated Wetland Permitting Plans
 Attachment 2 – NHF&G Coordination
 Attachment 3 - Updated Wetland Table and Functions and Values Sheets
 Attachment 4 – ARM Fund Sheets

CC: Jeremy Fennell, Eversource (email)
 Keith Goulet, ACOE (email)
 Campton, Thornton, and Woodstock Municipal Clerks (Hardcopy)
 Pemigewasset River Local Advisory Committee (Hardcopy)