

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office

Environmental Notification Form

<i>For Office Use Only</i>
EEA#: _____
MEPA Analyst: _____

The information requested on this form must be completed in order to submit a document electronically for review under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, 301 CMR 11.00.

Project Name: WT-02 Transmission Right-of Way Reliability Project		
Street Address: N/A – linear right-of-way project		
Municipality: Hancock, Lanesborough, Cheshire, Dalton and Hinsdale, MA	Watershed: Housatonic River and Hoosic River	
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: Start: 18T 656307.86mE, 4703469.79mN End: 18T 636302.45mE, 4711562.13mN	Latitude: Start: 42.267807° End: 42.544433° Longitude: Start: -73.098667° End: -73.339980°	
Estimated commencement date: 4th quarter 2022	Estimated completion date: 2nd quarter 2023	
Project Type: Utility	Status of project design: 90 %complete	
Proponent: NSTAR Electric Company d/b/a Eversource Energy		
Street Address: 247 Station Drive		
Municipality: Westwood	State: MA	Zip Code: 02090
Name of Contact Person: Rebecca Weissman		
Firm/Agency: SWCA Environmental Consultants	Street Address: 153 Cordaville Road, Suite 130	
Municipality: Southborough	State: MA	Zip Code: 01772
Phone: 508.233.8769	Fax: _____	E-mail: Rebecca.weissman@swca.com
Does this project meet or exceed a mandatory EIR threshold (see 301 CMR 11.03)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
If this is an Expanded Environmental Notification Form (ENF) (see 301 CMR 11.05(7)) or a Notice of Project Change (NPC), are you requesting:		
a Single EIR? (see 301 CMR 11.06(8))	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
a Rollover EIR? (see 301 CMR 11.06(13))	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
a Special Review Procedure? (see 301CMR 11.09)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
a Waiver of mandatory EIR? (see 301 CMR 11.11)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
a Phase I Waiver? (see 301 CMR 11.11)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
<i>(Note: Greenhouse Gas Emissions analysis must be included in the Expanded ENF.)</i>		
Which MEPA review threshold(s) does the project meet or exceed (see 301 CMR 11.03)?		
- 301 CMR(1)(a)(1): Direct alteration of 50 or more acres of land		
- 310 CMR(3)(a)(1)(a-b): Alteration of one or more acres of bordering vegetating wetlands and alteration of ten or more acres of any other wetlands		
Which State Agency Permits will the project require? Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection – 401 Water Quality Certification		
Identify any financial assistance or land transfer from an Agency of the Commonwealth, including the Agency name and the amount of funding or land area in acres: N/A		

Summary of Project Size & Environmental Impacts ¹	Existing	Change	Total
LAND			
Total site acreage	530		
New acres of land altered		Tree clearing: 137 ac Mats: 9.5 ac	
Acres of impervious area	N/A	N/A	N/A
Square feet of new bordering vegetated wetlands alteration		Tree clearing: 785,107 Mats: 345,742	
Square feet of new other wetland alteration ²		RFA tree clearing: 362,038 RFA mats: 68,026 IVW tree clearing: 4,487 IVW mats: 2,186 BLSF tree clearing: 126,687 BLSF mats: 68,292	
Acres of new non-water dependent use of tidelands or waterways		N/A	
STRUCTURES			
Gross square footage	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of housing units	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maximum height (feet)	N/A	N/A	N/A
TRANSPORTATION			
Vehicle trips per day	N/A	N/A	N/A
Parking spaces	N/A	N/A	N/A
WASTEWATER			
Water Use (Gallons per day)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Water withdrawal (GPD)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wastewater generation/treatment (GPD)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Length of water mains (miles)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Length of sewer mains (miles)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Has this project been filed with MEPA before? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (EEA # _____) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No			
Has any project on this site been filed with MEPA before? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (EEA # _____) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No			

¹ Impacts from tree clearing reflect a permanent conversion from forested to scrub-shrub community types; impacts from mats are temporary.

² RFA = 200-foot Riverfront Area; IVW = Isolated Vegetated Wetland; BLSF = Bordering Land Subject to Flooding

GENERAL PROJECT INFORMATION – all proponents must fill out this section

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Describe the existing conditions and land uses on the project site:

NSTAR Electric Company d/b/a Eversource Energy (Eversource) is filing this Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) for the Transmission Right-of-way Reliability Program (TRRP) within the existing WT-02 Right-of-Way (ROW), which runs from the NY state border in Hancock, Massachusetts, through the towns of Lanesborough, Cheshire, and Dalton, to the Berkshire substation in Hinsdale, Massachusetts (the Project). The Project area is approximately 14.5 linear miles within this ROW, which contains Line 393, a 345-kV overhead transmission line. The WT-02 ROW is 300 feet wide and has an existing maintained width between 125-150 feet.

Conditions within the Project area consist of upland and wetland areas with generally shrubby and herbaceous vegetation communities. Mature woody vegetation exists along the edges of the corridor. Water resources, including wetlands and streams, were delineated within the Project area in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022. The Project also crosses five priority habitats of state-listed species.

Land use adjacent to or within the Project area includes agricultural, lower-density residential, and several land conservation areas. The Project crosses an Environmental Justice (EJ) community in Lanesborough, which is designated due to income.

A detailed environmental analysis of conditions within and adjacent to the Project area is provided in Chapter 4 of the Project Narrative in Attachment 8. All resource areas crossed by the Project are depicted in the WT-02 TRRP MEPA EENF Map Set provided in Attachment 2. The figure provided in Attachment 1 depicts the general location of the Project on a USGS topographic map. An EJ Community map is provided in Attachment 3.

Describe the proposed project and its programmatic and physical elements:

NOTE: The project description should summarize both the project's direct and indirect impacts (including construction period impacts) in terms of their magnitude, geographic extent, duration and frequency, and reversibility, as applicable. It should also discuss the infrastructure requirements of the project and the capacity of the municipal and/or regional infrastructure to sustain these requirements into the future.

Eversource is responsible for maintaining a safe, reliable electric transmission system and is required to meet federal, regional, and electric industry reliability standards, which includes vegetation management. This requires a balance between the environmental benefits that trees provide with the responsibility to deliver safe and reliable power. Tall-growing trees located in electric transmission ROWs pose a risk to the safe operation of the system, which can result in widespread electric power outages or other public safety issues. To maintain compliance with industry standards, minimize risk to public safety, enhance reliability, and improve system performance during severe weather events, Eversource has developed TRRP, which consists of tree removal within the ROW along the existing edge of clearing to increase the distance between the overhead transmission lines and the adjacent, unmaintained/forested vegetation.

The TRRP is a long-term transmission system reliability and resiliency program that increases the maintained width of the ROW to the easement edge or 100 feet from the outermost conductor, whichever is closer. This program improves system reliability by reducing the number of tree fall-in risks and has proven to be an effective way to create a sustainable environment comprised of vegetation that can safely coexist with the transmission lines. Our long-term management objective is to manage these newly cleared areas as early succession habitat and encourage the growth of grasses, forbs and shrubs.

The proposed TRRP along this ROW will increase the maintained ROW width to up to approximately 200 feet by cutting trees from within the currently unmaintained/forested portions of the ROW, which increases the distance between the overhead transmission lines and the adjacent trees.

In addition, typical maintenance will also occur concurrently and will include:

- **Floor cutting, which is clearing all incompatible woody vegetation to maintained floor/easement ROW width. Woody vegetation is removed around all pole/tower structures, guide wires, gates/barriers and**

all “off road” access roads. Woody vegetation is removed 30 feet back from primary road crossings and/or ROW wooden barrier.

- Pruning tree limbs and hazard tree removal, which is required to ensure that vegetation does not contact or encroach within minimum distances of the energized transmission system.

There are existing established access roads within the ROW that will provide the primary access for construction work; no new access roads are proposed as part of this Project.

Describe the on-site project alternatives (and alternative off-site locations, if applicable), considered by the proponent, including at least one feasible alternative that is allowed under current zoning, and the reasons(s) that they were not selected as the preferred alternative:

NOTE: *The purpose of the alternatives analysis is to consider what effect changing the parameters and/or siting of a project, or components thereof, will have on the environment, keeping in mind that the objective of the MEPA review process is to avoid or minimize damage to the environment to the greatest extent feasible. Examples of alternative projects include alternative site locations, alternative site uses, and alternative site configurations.*

Tall-growing trees pose a serious safety hazard and risk to reliability given their potential to contact energized powerlines and infrastructure within a ROW. The Project purpose is therefore to remove non-compatible woody vegetation from within 100 feet of the outside conductor, or to the edge of Eversource’s easement to maintain the necessary horizontal clearance between vegetation and the overhead transmission lines and minimize the risk of tree falls that could result in power outages or safety hazards.

Under a No-Build Alternative, no tree removal would occur within the currently unmaintained/forested portions of the ROW. The No-Build Alternative would avoid the temporary and permanent environmental impacts associated with the Project. However, by not completing the Project, potential immediate hazards caused by trees coming into contact with electric facilities, as well as those that can ensue from power outages, will not be addressed. Reliance upon the existing system is at higher risk due to the increasing severity of storms in recent years which increase the potential for nearby trees to interfere with the power lines. Extended power outages could occur as a result of time-consuming distribution transfer switching and dangerous transmission line repairs necessary to restore customers’ electric supply. Therefore, Eversource determined that the No-Build Alternative would not address the identified reliability need.

Since the work proposed is specific to vegetation management within the existing WT-02 ROW containing Line 393, alternative options are limited to the No-Build Alternative. There are no alternatives to TRRP that will serve the Project’s purpose and need.

Temporary impacts to wetlands resulting from temporary construction matting to access tree clearing areas have been minimized to the extent practicable. Eversource’s contractor, vegetation management team, and environmental consultants conducted a detailed constructability review of the entire ROW in December 2021 to identify locations where construction matting would be required; assess site-specific conditions to determine access; and review sensitive areas that may require specialized tree removal techniques, such as hand clearing, cutting of trees from equipment operating outside sensitive areas, and “drop and lop” techniques that would keep downed debris from being dragged out of sensitive areas. The proposed access and construction matting depicted in the WT-02 TRRP MEPA EENF Map Set in Attachment 2 represents the efforts of the constructability review team to avoid and minimize impacts.

Summarize the mitigation measures proposed to offset the impacts of the preferred alternative:

Eversource has carefully designed and sited the proposed Project to avoid and minimize environmental impacts. Existing access roads and other improved surfaces will be used by vehicles and equipment to the maximum extent practicable. Where crossing wetlands or watercourses is unavoidable, temporary access roads consisting of construction mats will be installed to minimize impacts to wetlands and waterbodies. Contractors will be required to use low-impact tree clearing methods that incorporate a variety of approaches to minimize site disturbance. Sediment and erosion controls and other best management practices (BMPs)

will be employed to minimize the potential for any adverse indirect environmental impacts. Any disturbed areas in wetlands or uplands will be restored and allowed to revegetate with compatible vegetation after tree work is complete.

Some permanent conversion of palustrine forested (PFO) wetlands to palustrine scrub-shrub (PSS) wetlands will occur as a result of tree removal. Eversource is currently working with state regulatory agencies, including the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) to develop an appropriate mitigation plan. Additional information on impact avoidance and minimization is provided in Chapter 5 and mitigation measures proposed for the Project is provided in Chapter 7 of the Project Narrative in Attachment 8.

If the project is proposed to be constructed in phases, please describe each phase:

N/A. Although appropriate construction scheduling will be used to meet any required time-of-year restrictions developed in consultation with the regulatory authorities, the Project is not being proposed in phases.

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN:

Is the project within or adjacent to an Area of Critical Environmental Concern?

Yes (Specify _____)
 No

if yes, does the ACEC have an approved Resource Management Plan? ___ Yes ___ No;
If yes, describe how the project complies with this plan.

Will there be stormwater runoff or discharge to the designated ACEC? ___ Yes ___ No;

If yes, describe and assess the potential impacts of such stormwater runoff/discharge to the designated ACEC.

RARE SPECIES:

Does the project site include Estimated and/or Priority Habitat of State-Listed Rare Species? (see http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/regulatory_review/priority_habitat/priority_habitat_home.htm)

Yes (Specify **Priority Habitat #'s 1667, 1649, 1655, 1646, 1546. See Attachment 2 for mapped locations and Section 4.4.2 in the Project Narrative provided in Attachment 8 for detailed descriptions.**) No

HISTORICAL /ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES:

Does the project site include any structure, site or district listed in the State Register of Historic Place or the inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth?

Yes (Specify: see Section 4.7 of Project Narrative in Attachment 8) No

If yes, does the project involve any demolition or destruction of any listed or inventoried historic or archaeological resources? Yes (Specify _____) No

Review of the Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth indicates that several previously recorded historic and archaeological sites are located within and immediately adjacent to the Project area. Additional information regarding Eversource's approach to identify and protect historic and archaeological resources during the Project can be found in Section 4.7 of the Project Narrative in Attachment 8.

WATER RESOURCES:

Is there an Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) on or within a half-mile radius of the project site? X Yes ___ No;

if yes, identify the ORW and its location.

ORWs crossed by the Project include:

- five tributaries to Anthony Brook in Dalton (public water supply watershed)
- three tributaries to Egypt Brook in Dalton (public water supply watershed)
- four tributaries to Cleveland Brook in Hinsdale (public water supply watershed)
- certified vernal pools in various locations along the ROW