

# BAPE tells Hydro to re-evaluate Northern Pass line

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Hydro-Québec will have to re-evaluate in more detail the feasibility of burying part of the Quebec-New Hampshire interconnection line before getting a green light from the government for the implementation of the \$125-million project, scheduled to come on line in 2019.

The Office of Public Hearings on the Environment (BAPE) made the recommendation in a report made public last Thursday by the Quebec Minister of the Environment, David Heurtel, regarding the Quebec-New Hampshire Northern Pass interconnection.

In its 149-page report, the BAPE addresses both the environmental and economic impacts of the project, which was the subject of 21 submissions during two public meetings held in Sherbrooke last October.

The project consists of the construc-

tion of a 320 kV line over a distance of 79 kilometers between the Estrie station located in Val-Joli and the New Hampshire border near the municipality of East Hereford.

With regard to the environment, BAPE heard arguments from environmental groups, who claim that Hydro-Québec too quickly discarded the option of burying part of the line, particularly where the planned route crosses the Hereford community forest. Hydro had rejected this option due to its elevated cost.

BAPE considers that Hydro Quebec's impact study "fails to take into account the objective of conserving the forest in perpetuity or the legal obligations under a forest conservation easement connected to the Hereford forest. Furthermore, the report says the impact of an underground line outside the forest boundaries of have not been analyzed by Hydro-Québec.

As a result, BAPE recommends that

the public utility re-evaluate the option and that the results of this reassessment be made public.

In the event that the route currently proposed is retained, the BAPE recommends the implementation of a pilot project to selectively cut two residual bands 9 m wide on either side of the right-of-way where the trees would be maintained at a maximum height of 12 meters.

The BAPE is asking Hydro to reassess the option of burial because "deforestation would accentuate the fragmentation of habitats, mainly on the territory of the Hereford Community Forest," the report says and that the loss of 282 hectares of forest environment would result in a reduction in region's carbon capture capacity.

BAPE also believes Hydro's responsibility should be expanded to include helping landowners control and eradicate invasive species that might emerge within the right-of-way.