



1414-B Indian Creek Valley Road, PO Box 408, Melcroft PA 15462 (724) 455-4200

Sep 26, 2024

Nicholas C. Noss, P.E.
Senior Engineer Project Manager
Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission
700 S. Eisenhower Blvd.
Middletown, PA 17057

The greatest concern for the “Gray Cut Alternative” is that utilizing a project model that bases the realignment of the turnpike tunnel on the severing of the Great Allegheny Mountain poses serious threats to our natural environment and the local communities that call the mountain home.

The top of the Allegheny Mountain is home to critical wildlife habitat. Severing the connectivity between the habitats north and south of the mountain would disrupt migration patterns for birds, mammals and amphibians, prevent a flow of genetics between those populations, and overall endanger the species that call the mountain home. There are 12 avian species, 5 mammalian species, and 1 reptilian species observed within the Project Study Area according to the PTC Environmental Document, that fall in Pennsylvania’s Wildlife Action Plan for Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Two of the five mammalian species observed in the project study area, are also federally listed as “Endangered” by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Gray Cut would require the removal of large forest stands and the displacement of massive amounts of soil and sediment, which can never be reestablished. You can not replant a mountain. The mass removal of soil and sediment will pose serious threats to the current stakeholders and any potentially future

stakeholders involved in this region, as well as void the various collaborative conservation and preservation projects that have already been so painstakingly completed in the region. The Allegheny Mountain is a marvel and is one of the highest points in Pennsylvania. The mountain also sits at an amazing triple watershed divide. It is the headwaters for many waterways. The Stonycreek River, the Raystown Branch of the Juniata, and the Indian Lake all have something to lose if the mountain is cut and millions of cubic yards of soil and sediment are displaced and make their way into the water supply.

Along with the concern of soil erosion and accompanied sedimentation that will arise from exposed layers of rock, is the concern for acid drainage. The excavation that will need to be done to dissect the the mountain and provide a clean cut will expose layers of soil strata and multiple geologic units to create the potential for overburden that will need to be neutralized so water quality for local community residence and the surrounding aquatic habitats won't suffer. Millions of dollars have already been spent on restoring the Stony Creek Watershed from a legacy of mining that has left an enormous impact.

Even more concerning is disconnecting the forest stand and destroying the natural wildlife corridor above the mountain, cutting through the layers of sediment; essentially removing the heart of the mountain, and impacting the streams and wetlands present, will certainly disrupt our local communities. Locals will lose a piece of history, The Allegheny Mountain Tunnel has always been regarded as a marvel and well revered in the state. Locals will lose a way of life, The Mountain Field and Stream Club not only hunt, fish, and hike on that mountain. They practice deep rooted traditions and share in comradery with their family, friends, and neighbors. Locals also stand to lose one of most precious resources; fresh clean water. The demolition of the mountain will affect the water supply for residents and taxpayers who not only rely on borough supplied water but also those who rely on private wells and natural springs.

I am aware that impacts will occur no matter the alternative that is chosen for the project and mitigation for construction will have to occur.

However,

- How will you mitigate for a wildlife corridor that is expansive and large enough to *appropriately* replace the existing passageway on top of the mountain that so many species already rely on?

- How will you mitigate the exposed layers of sediment that will be revealed from cutting a mountain, that will continuously erode and degrade the local streams and people's water supplies?
- How will you mitigate the increased deposition of excessive salts that will be needed to keep the road safe in winter, that will make its way into our streams and waterways?
- How will you take into deeper consideration the potential for extreme weather events that would reduce the safety of the passageway. *There is great concern for the extreme weather events and wind patterns that will arise from creating a gash in the mountain.*
- How will you mitigate the loss of established wetlands that will face impaction during and after construction? *-Creating or restoring a wetland habitat in another location will not rectify the well established wetlands that contribute to water quality and wildlife habitat at and around the Mountain.*
- How will you mitigate the loss of landscape that is in so many ways the identity of our rural community? *-The Allegheny Mountain is a symbol of heritage in the region. Ancestors of local residences traveled those mountains to set down roots in Pennsylvania.*
- How will you ensure that the Berlin Borough and surrounding communities have access to a **quality** water supply, free of contaminants, that is flowing and plentiful, and available for years to come? *-Monitoring will only make aware that an impact has occurred, it will not protect or prevent a water impaction and will not rectify it.*
- Has the Commission considered land and rock slide potential from having exposed sediment layers and do their safety concerns take into consideration this possibility?
- Has the commission considered the cost of acid drainage remediation and the continued maintenance of treatment that will be needed if rock with acid bearing potential is disturbed during construction?

Mitigation is also not a complete cure for impact. Mitigation, by definition, is the action of reducing the severity, seriousness, or painfulness of something, however

prevention is typically regarded as the best remedy. With this being said, choosing an alternative that does not sever the mountain, seems to be the decision that has the greatest reduction in severity, seriousness, or painfulness to the local residents, the waterways, and the wildlife on the mountain.

I understand the need for an updated or refurbished passageway and for infrastructure that reduces congestion and increases safety for travelers, but citizens and stakeholders seriously question if performing a devastating cut through the mountain is the only viable alternative for the project needs.

The Citizens to Save the Allegheny Mountain have so far collected close to 1000 signatures and counting from concerned citizens that have signed a petition in opposition to the Gray Cut and urge for a compromise.

We ask that you thoroughly reconsider an alternative to a cut project, that accomplishes increased safety and a decrease in traffic congestion, but that takes into serious account the **voices and concerns of those who will be most affected by this project.**

Sincerely,

Chantelle F. Hutchens, Community Organizer

Mountain Watershed Association

1414-B Indian Creek Valley Road

PO Box 408

Melcroft PA 15462

(724) 455-4200