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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**APPALACHIAN POWER SCHEDULES BLAND OPEN HOUSE TO DISCUSS PLANNED TRANSMISSION UPGRADE PROJECT**

ROA NOKE, Va., March 10, 2015 – Appalachian Power will host an open house this month to seek valuable public input about the planned improvements to the electric transmission grid in southwest Virginia.

The Bland Area Improvements Project, originally announced by Appalachian in January, will upgrade the existing 20-mile South Bluefield-Wythe 69-kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 138 kV, add approximately 6 miles of new 138-kV transmission line and build a new substation to support local power distribution in Bland County.

The existing line was built in 1917 and requires an upgrade to ensure continued reliability for the local area while providing an infrastructure capable of handling future economic growth. The majority of the work will be done in Bland and Wythe counties, in Va., with about 1 mile of the line extending into Mercer County, W.Va. The existing line runs through parts of the Jefferson National Forest. Appalachian Power plans to minimize its impact on the forest by reducing the total number of structures.

“This project is very beneficial for the area because it directly supports the electric reliability of these counties,” said Mary Begley, external affairs manager for Appalachian Power. “We understand the work to reinforce and maintain a strong, capable and resilient grid can sometimes be disruptive to some property owners. We want to make sure residents have an opportunity to take part in our siting process by providing input to help us minimize impacts to the community and the environment.”

The open house is scheduled for Thursday, March 26, from 5 – 8 p.m. at Bland County Elementary School, 31 Rocket Dr., Bland Va. Visitors can come at any time during the three-hour open house and have the opportunity to view maps of the potential route, learn about project details and talk with members of the project team. The goal of the open house is to gather valuable information to help in the siting process.

Following the field work and public comment period, Appalachian Power will file a request to construct the project with the Virginia State Corporation Commission. After regulatory approval, construction is scheduled to start in fall 2016 and be completed by December 2018. Estimated budget for the project is \$70-90 million.

Additional information about the project, including a project timeline, maps and continuous updates, can be found at [www.AppalachianPower.com/Bland](http://www.AppalachianPower.com/Bland).

Appalachian Power has 1 million customers in Virginia, West Virginia and Tennessee (as AEP Appalachian Power). It is a unit of American Electric Power, one of the largest electric utilities in the United States, which delivers electricity to more than 5.3 million customers in 11 states. AEP ranks among the nation's largest generators of electricity, owning nearly 38,000 megawatts of generating capacity in the U.S. AEP also owns the nation's largest transmission system, a nearly 40,000-mile network that includes more 765 kilovolt extra-high voltage transmission lines than all other U.S. transmission systems combined.

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