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5. PUBLIC LANDS: Spaceport threatens historic trail in N.M., critics say (06/21/2007)

April Reese and Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* reporters

A stretch of the El Camino Real, an early trade route that once linked Mexico City to Santa Fe, N.M., is threatened by a commercial spaceport to be built near the trail, landing New Mexico's segment of the Camino Real on a historic preservation group's [list](#) of the nation's top 11 most endangered historic places.

The \$225 million spaceport, would lie within three miles of the trail, the earliest Euro-American trade route. Noise and traffic from the spaceport would disrupt the experience of visiting the trail, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's latest list of endangered sites and buildings.

"It's being placed adjacent to one of the most pristine sections of the trail that is in New Mexico," said Daniel Carey, director of the National Historic Trust for Preservation's southwest office.

Airborne rockets, launch pads, hangers and other structures will create visual pollution, and the facility will create noise as well, he said. "It will all compromise that solemn experience you have when you travel Camino Real."

Furthermore, the spaceport is likely to attract more development in the area, Carey said.

Spaceport officials say they will restrict development in a 20-mile radius around the spaceport site and plan to establish park-and-ride sites to reduce traffic. Carey said he would rather see the site moved back from the trail.

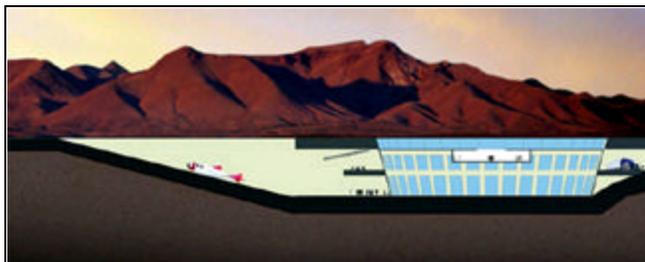
David Wilson, a spokesman for the New Mexico Spaceport Authority, said the site was chosen to allow the spaceport to share restricted airspace with the nearby White Sands Missile Range and that moving the location is unlikely.

Furthermore, in some ways the trail will be better protected with the spaceport a few miles away, he added. "It allows some control over that area," he said. "We can limit crossings [over the trail] and not create any new ones."

Carey said the group plans to weigh in with its concerns during the EIS process.

New Mexico Spaceport Authority officials have said they hope to have a license by the start of 2008 to begin construction. This week, the New Mexico Spaceport Authority narrowed its list of prospective design contractors to three finalists. A project architect will soon be hired, the agency said.

The facility is scheduled to be operational by late 2009 or early 2010.



An artist's conception of the proposed Spaceport in the N.M. desert. Courtesy of Virgin Galactic/New Mexico Spaceport Authority.

Transmission corridors pose risk to public sites

Also appearing on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2007 list of endangered places are numerous sites of Civil War engagements that could be affected by proposed high-voltage electric lines. In particular, the trust cited the recent designation by the Department of Energy of a broad swath of Northeastern and mid-Atlantic states as part of the National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors ([Land Letter](#), May 3).

Within this huge area, said the trust, there are at least 55 national parks and 14 heritage sites, which also encompasses African-American historic sites, numerous scenic rivers and byways, and the nation's greatest concentration of Civil War battlefields.



High-voltage transmission line developments pose a threat to Civil War battlefields, landmarks and public lands, say opponents of Energy Department policies to designate national transmission corridors. Photo by Sean Ramsay. Courtesy of the Energy Overseer.

According to the trust, NIETC's "fast-track approval process is likely to preclude meaningful federal protection for historic resources as mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act and National Environmental Policy Act. It will also undermine the work of generations of local residents and elected officials to protect the corridors' historic character and natural beauty for all Americans."

Sites that were specifically detailed by the trust as potentially threatened include: Dominion/Allegheny Energy's 500-kilovolt line with 160-foot towers and a 200-foot right of way, that could reach some 240 miles from southern Pennsylvania, through West Virginia, and ending in Loudoun County, Va.

For the seven Virginia counties involved, the power company's proposed routes would adversely affect 21,725 acres of Civil War battlefields, 37 designated historic sites, 69,190 acres of designated historic districts, 12.9 miles of the Appalachian Trail, 70 miles of birding and wildlife trails, 208 miles of designated scenic byways, 62 miles of designated scenic rivers, 100,200 acres of land privately protected through conservation easements, and 9,744 acres of publicly owned open space.

Also, the trust said that a 190-mile, 400 kV line, with 120-foot towers and 200-foot right of way, is proposed for New York. The proposed line would potentially adversely affect the portions of the Delaware River that are currently designated as "wild and scenic" as well as 66 historic sites and districts that are listed or eligible

for listing in the National Register. At least 265 archaeological sites are in the path of the proposed power line, the trust said.

According to testimony from the National Parks Conservation Association presented this week at a June 18 DOE meeting in Pittsburgh on the NIETC proposals, the eastern corridor would include scenic view sheds for Gettysburg National Military Park, Antietam National Battlefield, Monocacy National Battlefield, Shenandoah National Park, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, among other sites of historic interest.

The endangered list did not include any parts of the proposed Western electric corridors -- although opponents are also citing potential risks to public lands and facilities. According to recent testimony from the Wilderness Society, 13 national wildlife refuges, five National Park service units and dozens of other areas set aside for conservation purposes in the West are at risk to transmission development under NIETC.

The trust's most endangered list, however, did include motels along the old U.S. Route 66 highway from Illinois to California.

[Click here](#) to see more about the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2007 list of 11 most endangered places.