

NBATC Response to Scoping Invitation

Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club (NBATC) maintains the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) in the vicinity of the Balcony Falls to Skimmer transmission project. Except for projecting somewhat higher above the treeline, once the project is completed, the proposed Corten steel monopoles will be less visible than the current lattice towers and H-frame structures. Therefore NBATC sees the result of the proposed project as a positive.

While work is being done on the transmission line, parts of the A.T. and A.T. side trails will be affected. There are three primary areas that will be affected:

- Matts Creek Trail on the west side of the James near the old Snowden highway bridge.
- A.T. through the Rocky Row Run canyon
- Dominion access roads near Johns Hollow Shelter

Details of each of these areas follow.

Misnamed Road

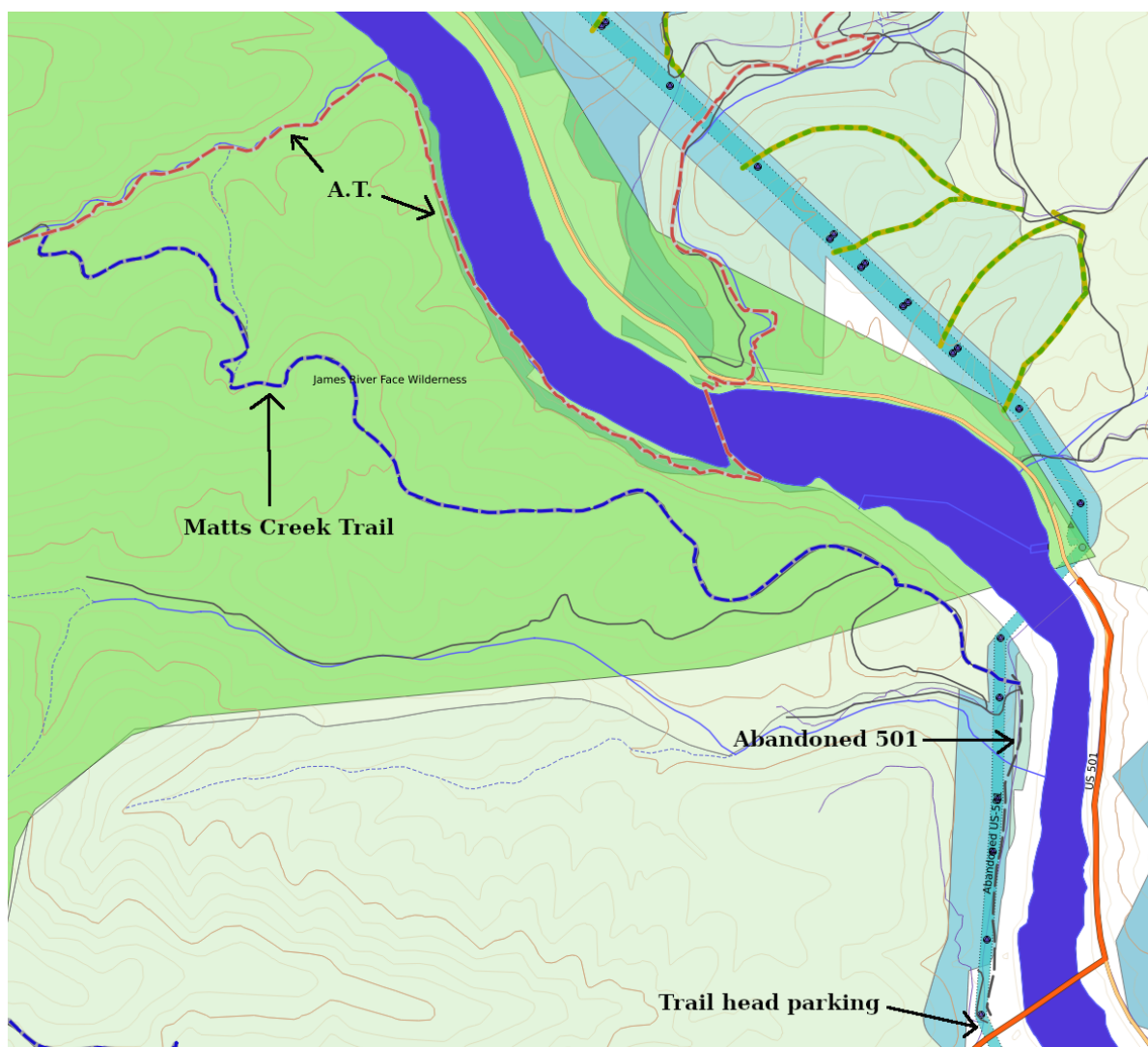
In the USFS roads GIS data, one of the roads is misnamed. USFS 36, VA 812, Hercules Road is misnamed Rocky Row Run. Rocky Row Run is the name of the stream that parallels Hercules Road. To add to the confusion, Rocky Row (Little and Big) are the names of two of the exposed rock strata which form part of the ridge from Bluff Mountain to the James River as well as a side trail from the A.T. on the ridge to US 501. During the discussions on March 10, 2022, this misnaming both on Dominion maps and verbally, caused some confusion to NBATC.

Matts Creek Trail

The Matts Creek Trail was a former route of the A.T., descending to the now demolished Snowden bridge across the James River. The trail now functions as an alternate route to the A.T., and is used by local hikers for “key-exchange” or shuttle based hikes to the A.T. parking on US 501/VA 130.

The access to this trail is via an abandoned section of US 501 running on the south (west) side of the James. Dominion Power plans to use this same abandoned section for access to the transmission line upgrade. The designated parking for hikers is located next to the current US 501, and a Forest Service gate limits the abandoned road to foot travel only.

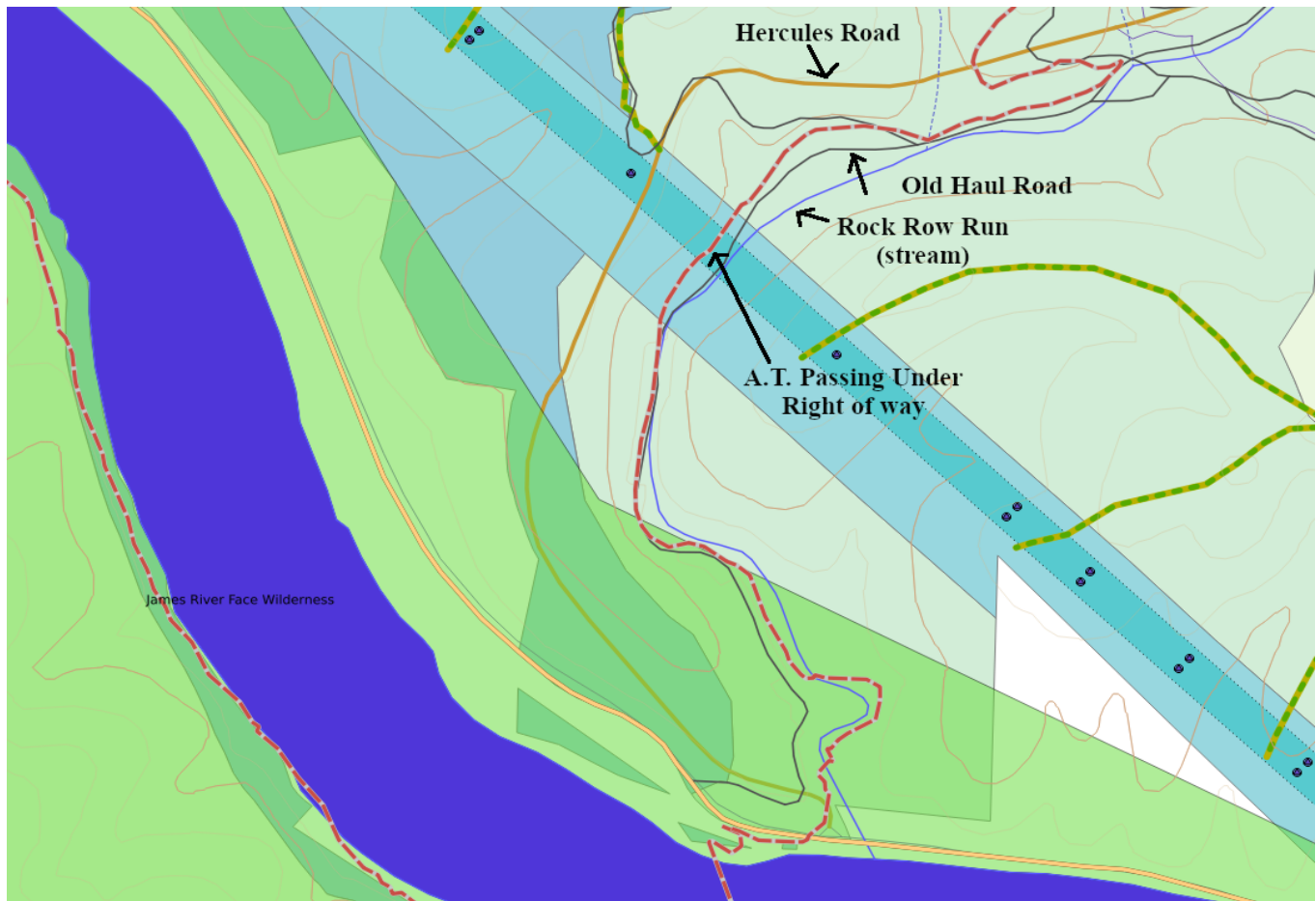
NBATC would like to preserve hiker access to the Matts Creek trail, and to see that the times hikers are blocked from using the access road during the construction to be as limited as possible.



A.T. Though Rocky Row Run Canyon

The A.T. and the stream Rock Row Run cross under the transmission line in a tight narrow canyon. The current transmission lines cross well above the canyon between towers on the opposing rims. We were relieved to hear that this condition has a name “vista bottom”, and as such the stream and trail will not be subject to the usual clearing of the right of way.

We understand that some of the trees along the substantially higher Hercules Road will need to be cleared to protect the transmission lines.



Dominion Power Access Roads

The GIS data from U.S. Forest Service shows multiple access roads giving Dominion Power access to their towers. Dominion has stated that they will be upgrading some of these roads to haul material to the sites of the new or replacement towers.

For the most part, these access roads are some distance from the A.T. or other hiking trails. However, there is an access road on the ridge above the Johns Hollow Shelter that is within 150 ft of the trail. NBATC hopes that the disruption in this area could be minimized.

