

## Measures face little opposition

Adirondack power line, inmate work rules both go to voters Nov. 3

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Voters on Election Day will get to say "yes" or "no" to two relatively new state ballot propositions: One that would allow a land swap for construction of a power line right of way in the Adirondacks, and the other to let inmates work on nonprofit projects as well as on the government projects they are currently allowed to do.

The power line would let National Grid obtain a 75-foot-wide right of way for about 2.5 miles along Route 56 in the North Country.

National Grid in return would give the state a 43-acre parcel of land along the Grass River that could be added to the Adirondack forest preserve.

The new line would go to the village of Tupper Lake, which currently is served by just one power line, meaning that the entire community gets blacked out in bad storms or when trees come down. When that happens, residents have to seek shelter in the Knights of Columbus hall, said John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council.

The council, a watchdog for the region's wilderness, favors the plan, and there appears to be little opposition to what Sheehan described as a win-win situation.

Sheehan said Tupper Lake residents need reliable electricity and the highway right-of-way is preferable to another option, which would have entailed running the line through a 6-mile stretch of untouched wilderness that includes wetlands and grouse habitat.

"Ecologically speaking, it's much more safe to take it down the highway instead of through this detour," said Sheehan.

The second proposition also appears to drawing little opposition.

It originated with the New York State Sheriffs' Association, some of whose members have long used volunteer jail inmates to perform tasks such as painting or cleaning town or county facilities.

In some cases, inmates had worked in cemeteries, which are non-government, raising the question of whether that was allowed. That led to the proposition, said Tom Mitchell, counsel for the association.

Sheriffs, Mitchell said, generally like having their willing inmates work.

The change would add nonprofit charitable organizations to the list of places where inmates could work. That would include charitable, religious or educational organizations.

"We see it as a positive step," added Robert Gangi, executive director of the Correctional Association of New York, which works for inmate rights.

"Anything that keeps prisoners occupied in a productive way is welcome," he said.

The Civil Service Employees Association, one of the state's largest public employees unions, has taken no stand on the issue.

But spokesman Stephen Madarasz noted that "It's a bit ironic that they are looking at allowing prisoners to take jobs away from law-abiding citizens when we have record unemployment."