

News from the SRA

By Jerry Stage, PhD

NCLT's Scantic Riparian Area (SRA) has been the site of major activity over the past 12 months. According the Northeast Utilities' on site subcontractor the splices on the high tension power lines that run the length of the property were in danger of failing from overheating and had to be replaced.

Activity started last March with the installation of a gate at Durkee Road closing off the service road that heads south more than a half mile under the lines. (Yes, we've got the combination.) Next, ground crews used a giant brush hog on the arm of an excavator to clear sufficient overgrown brush to create a fourteen foot wide roadway where there had been only a narrow path. They also created parking spaces adjacent to the Durkee tower by adding fill in the wetland. Finally, in late March line crews arrived with oversized boom trucks ("cherry pickers") and manually replaced all the splices at the Durkee Road tower.

After a peaceful spring and summer activity resumed with a vengeance last fall when they came back to replace the splices at the southern tower as well as some in the sag line between the towers. This was a much bigger job.

First, they graveled more than a half mile of the service road so it could support the weight of heavy equipment. Second, they created extensive platforms of heavy pallets that easily covered (floated on) 10,000 square feet of wetland around the southern tower and under the splices in the sag line. Next, they brought in even larger boom trucks and replaced the splices.

This time they used a relatively new and very noisy technology called *implosive* splicing. Anyone living within several miles of the lines probably heard the explosions off and on all summer and fall. The thunder-like sounds can supposedly be heard 10 miles away.

In implosive splicing the cable ends are forced into an aluminum sleeve which is surrounded by coils of high explosive cord. The detonation is timed precisely in such a way that the explosive force is directed inward to compress and fuse the cable sleeve tightly around the cable. Finally, they removed the pallets and equipment and let peace return.

It is too soon to tell how this disruption will affect the wildlife in the SRA. It is clear that bird activity along the service road was reduced during the spring and summer. In the long run it will surely recover as the shrubbery and wetland plants grow back. My greatest concern is that the disturbances will make it easier for invasive plants such as Purple Loosestrife and Phragmites will spread further. Careful monitoring is planned.

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