

## Summary of VELCO plans for power line activity at Silver Lake Woods, 2024-2025

In April 2024, rough usage by large ATVs on the Silver Lake Class 4 road and walking trails was noted. The tracks continued on to the VELCO power line right of way, where evidence of activity by VELCO was observed. When VELCO was alerted to this, they apologized for the disturbance, and noted there would certainly be more activity on their power line in the near future, as they are about to change out a number of the poles on the Silver Lake Woods property. The specific wording from Allyson Brown, VELCO Real Estate and Right-of-Way Lead, is as follows:

“Thanks for reaching out and my apologies if our crews accessing the ROW caused any issues. The poles along that line are starting to show their age and we had a crew looking at these poles to determine the scope and timing for the various pole’s replacement. The crew took two UTVs [Utility Task Vehicles] in to access the poles, so I suspect this would have been related to that. I will ask them that in the future they not drive directly on the foot bridges if avoidable and to avoid the water bars if possible as well. VELCO is encountering more and more challenges with accessing our ROWs from our historical access routes as land changes hands, subdivides and changes land use, including the access routes being converted to public walking trails.

The poles will need to be replaced sometime in the next year or two and we will be in touch with more information about that as things develop and timelines are refined. There are many variables, including environmental constraints, that go into those project plans and we will request that we meet on site at some point to review our plans and see how can we best collaborate. It is also likely that we need to perform grounding remediation (add lightning strike grounding protection) at many if not all of the poles in that stretch later this summer to get us through until we can replace aged poles. We will be in touch as soon as we can with more information.”

We responded that we would appreciate the suggested opportunity for a site visit with them, and also asked whether VELCO could document their legal access through Silver Lake Woods to get to their power line ROW. They responded to this request by emailing two easements which they had acquired from previous owners Wylie and Moseley. These documents are filed in our GCC drive, at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oh2dorVDyvhA7KzjYW4gLP6cKkCrXxey>

These two legal documents show that VELCO does have easements across our property as deeded by former owners Moseley and Wylie. These easements allow access to their ROW across any part of the property. Those easements also state that VELCO must reimburse the property owner for any damage done by their equipment.

VELCO also would like to have their easement revised to create a preferred route through the property. In a nutshell, while their various easements in Vermont (including that to SLW) allow them to cross private land, they are running into significant obstacles as new development and other land use changes abutting power corridors seriously limits their access points. Therefore, they are working to permanently secure their preferred routes. In our case, this is our Class 4 Silver Lake road to the town property, and then our west loop (Purmort, aka Purmont) walking trail. Note that establishing a defined permanent access route would not eliminate their easement rights via any other routes through the property. See partial property map, below.

On Wednesday morning, June 19, Alysia Catalfamo and Tom Hargy of Georgia Conservation Commission met with three VELCO staff members, Marina Vitagliano, Allyson Brown, and Jacob Watrous, to hear about their upcoming pole replacement activities at the power line through SLW, and to discuss means of minimizing any damage to our Class 4 road and trails while their crews move equipment to the power corridor.

On August 27, these VELCO representatives met us again at Silver Lake Woods, along with Charlie Hancock, State Forester for Franklin County (and author of the 2018 Silver Lake Forest Management Plan), and Tucker Malone of Vermont Land Trust (the organization holding the Conservation Easement for the property).

During these site visits, they indicated the following:

- Preparation for pole replacement will occur in Fall to early winter of 2024. This includes bringing materials to the site, as well as road and trail improvement - see discussion below.
- Replacing the existing wooden poles with new metal poles (they will still have two poles per location). This would occur in the coming winter (beginning sometime between December 2024 and Feb 2025), and would be expected to take several weeks to a month.
- Mulching and seeding would occur in Spring 2025.
- They stated they were willing to significantly improve the class 4 road and west loop trail to the power line, by adding 12" of porous stone where needed, and including water bars to deflect runoff from the paths. This would mostly be necessary on the Class 4 road .
- Following the major work, they would mulch and seed the walkway. This activity would require trimming some overhead trees along the way, but would not involve cutting many trees, if any.

- Our lower, main bridge, just above the trailhead, would need to be temporarily moved out of its present location during their pole replacement activity. They would install a temporary bridge at that location during pole replacement.
- All SLW trails would be closed during pole replacement, but could be open during preparation stages. Either the main or west loop trail would need to be closed when grounding wire work is underway in the vicinity.
- During pole replacement, they would need to move equipment across the Silver Lake stream where it crosses the power line (in the valley between the two trail crossings), and would use 16-ft wide mats to do so.
- Ongoing access to the power line for vegetation removal and pole grounding activity would continue to be along our main (Blake) trail, rather than their preferred access trail on the west loop. This would involve ATV traffic. GCC voiced concern about damage to the trail and the stream crossing near our small bridge, as seen during activities this April. They could only assure us they would be careful, and try to minimize damage.
- Existing cross arms from the present pairs of poles would be removed. They offered to leave four of them so that we could construct a wider bridge at the confluence of Silver Lake stream and the beaver pond stream. These are 29 feet long, and are roughly 8"x 8" beams. The wider bridge would allow them to occasionally access the corridor for annual inspections and less frequent vegetation clearing. This might be a mixed blessing, as we already have a bridge in place for pedestrians, and it would be our responsibility to make the new, wider one to protect the stream from future damage by their equipment. We would be responsible for all costs, such as labor and lumber, for this structure. Charlie Hancock has indicated he may be able to assist us in finding grant funds for this.

This information regarding VELCO's plans came to the Conservation Commission just as we were in the preliminary stage of considering forest management activities at Silver Lake Woods, so as to improve the forest and comply with our Forest Management Plan. We have walked the forest with the county forester and Vermont Land Trust with this in mind. One obstacle we had anticipated was that bringing equipment into the property would require beefing up the Class 4 road. If VELCO accomplishes this task for us, we would have a clearer path forward, so that there would be lower upfront costs, improving the financial outlook of a timber project which already appears to promise a positive return.

We are beginning to put together information to present to the Selectboard in the near future regarding this forest management project, and we would be happy to discuss

this and the VELCO activity at any time. We also offer to walk the trails with you at your convenience.

