



## **Good Friday Surprise – Columbia cuts in Mohican Forest, in violation of agreement barely a month old.**

On Friday, April 6, 2007, an ODNR Division of Forestry inspector came across a nauseating site: a 50-foot by 283-foot swath of toppled trees in the Mohican Memorial State Forest.

The culprit turned out to be a contractor of the Columbia Gas Transmission Corporation, who had been cutting trees on private property along a natural gas transmission pipeline controlled by the company. Despite the prominent posting of ODNR signs marking the Mohican Forest boundary, the contractor continued cutting along the pipeline onto state land for nearly the length of a football field.

Barely a month ago, Columbia Gas signed a five-year agreement with the ODNR that provided for the limited clearing of trees on forest land near Columbia Gas storage wells. That agreement pertains to tree cleanings around wells, only—*not* transmission pipelines. The company expressly agreed that clearings along pipelines in the Mohican Forest and nearby state park land shall be considered until the ODNR and Columbia Gas work out a separate negotiated agreement on pipeline rights of way. Such a settlement has not yet been reached.

The Ohio Environmental Council is pleased with the ODNR Division of Forestry's rapid response. As soon as its inspector discovered the violation, the OEC acted quickly and decisively, collecting evidence and alerting the local news media and stakeholders to the damage from the breach of the agreement.

The OEC believes the compromise over the wellheads recently struck by ODNR and the company is a fair one. We have high expectations for future negotiations over pipeline maintenance between ODNR and the company. However, the OEC is very disappointed with Columbia's breach of the agreement, and its violation of Ohio's trust.

This recent incident underscores the need for the ODNR to remain vigilant to ensure that Columbia Gas will follow through with its commitments. The ODNR has treated this incident for what it is: a serious breach of the public trust. The ODNR—which is the legal guardian of the public's trust—must remain vigilant and take this breach into account in its oversight of gas company maintenance activities on state land.