



2026 P51 KICKOFF MEETING SUMMARY

This webcast introduced the 2026 plans for EPRI's Program 51, which addresses environmental challenges across transmission and distribution (T&D) infrastructure.

Program Scope and Strategic Direction

The kickoff reaffirmed that Program 51 focuses on environmental issues spanning the full T&D footprint, including transmission lines, distribution corridors, and substations. Topic areas include vegetation management, wildlife interactions with T&D assets, and broader environmental considerations at substations and along lines.

Program 51's strategy is aligned with EPRI's Vision 2030. "Integrate for impact" is reflected in ongoing collaboration with environmental and asset programs across EPRI. "Embed a global identity" will be pursued carefully by increasing engagement with neighboring regions while recognizing that most members are currently U.S.-based. "Broaden engagement" will center on highlighting program research, demonstrating implementation at utilities, and increasing the visibility of results across the industry.

A program-specific goal for 2026 is to increase and facilitate adoption of research, with a strong emphasis on making research "download today, use tomorrow," with deliverables designed to be practical and readily applicable.

AI, Emerging Technologies, and Line Siting

Supporting EPRI's broader AI transformation is a major 2026 theme. The team noted that rapid growth in AI applications is driving significant grid expansion needs, creating opportunities for Program 51 to contribute through line siting research.

Building on the EPRI-GTC siting model (updated in 2019 and with environmental equity and environmental justice considerations added in 2023), recent work has used machine learning and artificial neural networks to interpret land use and land cover from aerial imagery. The program also explored the feasibility of using AI tools to identify cultural resources. These efforts position Program 51 to independently evaluate emerging AI-powered line routing tools now entering the market.

A supplemental project has been launched to conduct pilots and validation of multi-vendor AI line siting solutions, with the intent of determining their practical value for member utilities.

More information about this project can be found here:

[Accelerating Grid Expansion: Independent Evaluation of Line Siting Technologies](#)

If you are interested in participating, please contact Faye Moser, fmoser@epri.com

2026 Engagement, Webcasts, and Communications

To make webcast attendance and engagements more impactful, Program 51 plans to:

- Hold monthly webcasts from February through November, on a consistent cadence. Sessions will be scheduled for one hour but designed for about 45 minutes of content to preserve time for discussion and allow early departures if needed.
- Attach concise executive summaries to webcast invitations so advisors can quickly determine relevance and identify colleagues who may benefit from attending.
- Replace a standalone newsletter approach with focused monthly email communications that highlight upcoming activities for the next month, key findings from current research, and links to associated reports. These monthly “quick hits” will be compiled into a quarterly newsletter.

Website analytics from 2024–2025 showed substantial growth in both views and distinct users, reinforcing the value of the Program 51 subscriber website. In 2026, the team plans to further leverage the site by adding tools, brief summaries of emerging technologies (building on the existing tech radar), and online guides derived from key research.

Research Portfolio and Wildfire Focus

The proposed 2026 portfolio ([slide 12 of the presentation](#)) spans vegetation management and remote sensing, wildlife interactions with T&D assets, environmental aspects of substations, environmental aspects of T&D lines, and cross-cutting strategic topics. Execution will depend on final membership levels and available resources.

Wildfire risk emerged as a prominent cross-cutting theme. Planned 2026 work includes evaluation of right-of-way vegetation flammability to inform wildfire risk assessment, studies of wildfire impacts on substations, and analogous investigations for T&D lines. Another wildfire-and-asset interaction activity is being developed in coordination with another EPRI program, to understand wildlife guards’ behavior under fault and implications for ignition risk.

Gathering Industry Perspectives

Several 2026 research topics require strong input from utilities. To make participation more convenient and inclusive (including for field personnel and organizations with travel/meeting constraints), the team plans to:

- Use structured surveys that advisors can complete at their convenience.
- Hold at least one peer-to-peer conversation for each topic where interested advisors can discuss experiences and practices.
- Offer one-on-one calls for advisors who prefer individual discussions or cannot participate in group sessions.

Wildlife Guard Flammability Collaboration

A collaborative opportunity was presented involving laboratory testing of wildlife guards (e.g., bushing covers and arrester caps) under simulated electrical fault conditions at EPRI's Lenox facility. Video footage showed a wildlife guard that deformed, detached, and ignited during a fault event, illustrating how certain materials could contribute to wildfire risk if flammable debris contacts combustible ground vegetation.

Another EPRI program has previously conducted flammability testing of wildlife guards, and Program 51 plans to partner on updated testing of newer units currently used by utilities. The concept is to obtain representative, new components and perform standardized electrical and flammability evaluations, providing participating utilities with tailored assessments of guard performance under fault scenarios.

If you are interested in your bushing covers and arrester caps to be evaluated, please contact Yamille del Valle, ydelvalle@epri.com.

2026 Calendar and Key Meetings

The 2026 calendar includes:

- Monthly virtual technology transfer webcasts (February–November).
- Task force meetings in February (two virtual, two-hour sessions).
- A prioritization webcast in early April and two virtual rollout sessions for the 2027 portfolio (late June and late July).
- In-person Environmental Summer meeting in early May in Tempe, Arizona.
- In-person Advisory Meetings held alongside other environmental programs in September in Dallas, Texas, to consolidate travel and coordination.
- A year-end webcast on December 10.

Finally, the team noted that the 2025 Program 51 deliverables are all available via product IDs listed in the slide deck ([slides 18-26](#)), allowing advisors to quickly locate and download completed reports, tools, and other outputs.