

FERC Scoping Meeting, Elkins, 1-23-15
Richard Laska

Thank you very much for being here and listening to our concerns. I have heard good things about the work of the FERC environmental crew.

My family farm abuts the Camp Allegheny civil war battlefield above Bartow. Both my farm and the battlefield overlook the proposed pipeline. The layout of the battlefield is such that the view from the top — where most of the soldiers fought and died — is breathtaking. For miles around there is not a sign of human habitation. The proposed pipeline will leave an indelible scar on that vista.

I am not here to oppose building natural gas pipelines. Increased natural gas production may justify a pipeline from West Virginia to the coast.

However, given the requirement that pipelines be a public convenience and necessity, and their location be environmentally sensible, Dominion's proposed routes do not qualify.

For many of us the pipeline will be more of a public nuisance than a public convenience. We lose our land and endure pipeline construction with no hope of getting the cheap natural gas flowing past our homes and businesses.

Because the pipeline will not serve West Virginia customers, public convenience would seem to demand that the pipeline exit the state via the least disruptive route. Several such routes exist. Dominion has summarily dismissed all of them.

The most obvious alternative is the existing Dedicated Utility Corridor through the Monongahela National Forest. Engineering and environmental studies have already been done. If is for this purpose that the Corridor was designed and there is no reasonable excuse for not using it.

As members of the Commission should be aware, pro-pipeline propaganda — uninhibited by veracity — is responsible for much of what is presented to you as “public support”. Thus far there has been no way for the people to get objective information.

Legitimate public support only comes from citizens who understand, and can pursue, their own best interests. But what is in our interests? Will the pipeline bring us cheap natural gas? Cheaper electricity? Lower property taxes? Good jobs? And will our forests and streams be protected from harm?

We have no trustworthy answers to any of these questions. How, therefore, can West Virginians give intelligent, informed consent?

One of your prior meetings ended with dozens of people having no time to speak. This high level of public interest, combined with the surprising number of written comments, a large dose of misinformation and pervasive confusion on the part of the public would seem to build a solid case for a formal public hearing.

Is there any way FERC can hold a formal public hearing to shed clear some light on our questions before the close of the comment period?

Personally, I have a grave concern that pipeline construction will do grievous harm to economically insecure Pocahontas County. Tourism is our largest source of jobs and income. Our pristine environment -- fishing, hunting, view shed and outdoor recreation -- are our only durable economic resources.

I'm part owner of a shop in Green Bank. There are only four main roads into our part of the county. Pipeline work may block traffic on three of them. We can't afford to lose those customers.

Thank you for considering the real interests of people who live here and work here.