

Allegheny Mountain Radio

Dominion Spokesperson Aaron Ruby on Draft Environmental Impact Statement – Pt. 1

<http://www.alleghenymountainradio.org/dominion-spokesperson-aaron-ruby-on-draft-environmental-impact-statement-pt-1/>

February 7, 2017

By Scott Smith

We recently spoke with Aaron Ruby, Dominion spokesperson for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline following the release of the Draft Environmental Statement on the project from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. In part one of this multi-part story, Mr. Ruby talks about what the report is, his impressions of the findings, and what the next steps are.

“The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, or FERC, is the lead federal agency that oversees the permitting process for our pipeline, and in late December, they released what is known as the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the project. And this draft environmental report is the comprehensive report that is produced by the agency which outlines all the potential environmental, and other, impacts of the project, and it also describes all of the measures that we will take, and that the agencies will require us to take, in order to minimize those impacts to the greatest extent possible.

“This was a major step forward for the project – it was a very significant milestone in the environmental review process. The conclusions of the report were very favorable – essentially, what the agency concluded is that all of the environmental measures, and the safety protections that we have put in place for the project would significantly reduce the impacts, and that the project will be built in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. This report is the culmination of more than two years of exhaustive study, by the agency, by our company, and a host of other state and federal agencies that are involved in the review, and it’s also the result of two years of very meaningful engagement with communities along the proposed route.

“The report drew from more than 100,000 of reports and documentation that we submitted to the agency. It drew from more than 35,000 public comments that have been submitted to FERC by landowners, agencies and other folks in the impacted communities. By any measure, this has, and will continue to be, a thorough process. It has afforded numerous opportunities for the public to help shape the project in a positive way, and ensure that it’s developed in an environmentally responsible manner.

“This is a draft environmental report, and what it does, as the name implies, is it will initiate – it has initiated a 90 day public comment period, and that is the opportunity for folks in the community, the general public, as well as all the other coordinating agencies that are involved in the permitting process to provide feedback to FERC on the contents of the draft environmental report. That comment period, I believe, closes in the first week of April, and once FERC has compiled all those public comments, they will then incorporate those into the final environmental impact statement, or the final environmental report, which will be released in June. And that final Environmental Impact Statement is going to serve as, essentially, the formal guidance document for the FERC commissioners in their decision making process on our certificate application. The final Environmental Impact Statement, and the recommendations that FERC staff makes in that final environmental report, that will guide the decision making of the FERC commissioners when they consider whether to approve the project.

“Beyond the measures and procedures and technologies that we have put in place for the project, FERC has required that we adopt some additional measures in order to further minimize impacts, or avoid and mitigate impacts in certain areas. So our responsibility over the next several months will be to demonstrate to FERC that we will comply with those additional conditions that they’ve placed on the application, and demonstrate that we will further minimize those impacts that they’ve identified.”

Dominion Spokesperson Aaron Ruby on Draft Environmental Impact Statement – Pt. 2

<http://www.alleghenymountainradio.org/dominion-spokesperson-aaron-ruby-on-draft-environmental-impact-statement-pt-2/>

February 8, 2017

By Scott Smith

In part one of our interview with Dominion spokesperson Aaron Ruby, he explained the nature of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, recently released by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and how it affects the project. In part two, he talks about some of the issues found within the report, and how the company plans to address them.

“There were some areas, some having to do with the width of the permanent right of way, some having to do with the method of crossing certain water bodies, where they have required that we re-evaluate what our proposed water body crossing method would be, or the width of the permanent right of way that we would maintain.

“I know that we’ve heard concerns from some folks in different communities about the impact that pipeline construction and operation would have on tourism. FERC looked at this very carefully, and they determined, based on decades of research, and additional research they

conducted for this project, that tourist economies are perfectly compatible with natural gas pipeline development. They also looked at concerns that have been raised about impacts on residential property values, or residential development. And what FERC concluded, that basically re-affirmed decades of research, showing that there is nothing about natural gas pipeline development that diminishes the residential property values or prevents developers from building residential properties.

“They also looked at, in terms of some of the geologic characteristics that you see in the western part of Virginia, and some areas of West Virginia – I’m sure you’re familiar with karst topography, and what FERC did is they looked very carefully at our karst mitigation plan, and they determined that our plans were adequate, and that they would significantly minimize risks to karst topography and to underground water aquifers, especially in the areas of western Virginia. In the areas of Highland and Bath County, and Augusta County, where we’ve identified existing caves or sinkholes or other karst features, or where we’ve found water wells or other sensitive water resources in close proximity to the route, we’ve adjusted the route in order to avoid those environmentally sensitive areas.

“We understand that there are some folks in bath and Highland, and other parts of western Virginia who’ve expressed concern about our ability to safely build the pipeline in some of the rugged mountainous terrain, and particularly on some of the steep slopes that are in the area. And, so, the environmental report looked at this very carefully, and they determined that we have put in place a very robust program in order to safely build this pipeline in some of the mountainous terrain that you find in western Virginia. What we’ve done is we put in place what we call a “best in class” program. Essentially, that’s an industry leading program that draws on the best industry practices available, and is intended to well above and beyond what is required by Federal regulations. And we believe that is going to serve as really a gold standard for the industry moving forward- not only have we put in place the procedures and the program that you need to control sedimentation and erosion, stabilize the soil, and safely build the pipeline in this kind of terrain, but we’ve also assembled the right team, with the skills and the experience and the qualifications you need in order to do this the right way.

“And, probably, most importantly, I would just say that, beyond a professional commitment that we make, and beyond just because we’re required to do these things by Federal and state regulations, we’ve got a deep personal stake in doing this project the right way. We’ve been here for 100 years – our employees, our sub-contractors that are going to be working on this project, we’ve got roots in Virginia and in the western part of Virginia that go back generations. And so, we’ve got a deeply personal stake in making sure that we do this the right way, that we do it in an environmentally responsible way, we do it safely, so that we preserve the natural beauty and the landscapes of the region for the enjoyment of future generations.”