

The Recorder

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Pipeline cannot be built without consequence

Editor, The Recorder,

I write to comment on two items included in the March 9 issue of The Recorder.

Scott Bazzarre, a Charlottesville contractor, wrote the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in favor of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, as reprinted in The Recorder: “Regardless of what the opponents say, there is no other viable option yet beyond using natural gas or going back to coal. As an engineer and contractor, I understand the math involved, and the only way it adds up is to get the ACP installed and operational as quickly as possible.”

Mr. Bazzarre’s conclusion and his math are at odds with a growing body of opinion that the ACP is not the only option to assure that those the pipeline would serve have sources of energy to meet future needs.

Numerous studies have been conducted, including a 2015 U.S. Department of Energy study and a FERC staff report the same year and industry observations, that there is sufficient capacity in existing pipelines to meet forecast energy requirements and that the nation is headed toward a circumstance of too many natural gas pipelines.

Furthermore, building new pipelines will become less necessary in the longer term because renewables (wind and solar), not natural gas, are the predominate source of new generating capacity being built in the nation. In 2015, the latest year for which figures are available, two-thirds of the new electric generating capacity built in the United States were wind and solar projects. Only 30 percent of new capacity was for natural gas, down by one-third from the previous year. This is not a trend that will change, even if the ACP is built!

The opening sentence of the front-page story, “Mountaintop removal worries neighborhood,” states: “He’s for the proposed pipeline, but not the route,” referring to Highland County Board of Supervisors Chair David Blanchard. The article goes on to cite the attractiveness of the potential tax revenues that Dominion says Highland County would receive should the ACP be built as planned.

The problem with this reasoning is that it presumes those promised tax revenues are without a cost. They are decidedly not.

There would be significant costs to the county should the ACP be built, as Bill Limpert states in his own letter that appeared in the March 9 Recorder.

The attractiveness of Highland and Bath counties as places to live and visit is based upon the incredible natural beauty of the area, highlighted by matchless mountain vistas and the clean water resources. These are our assets. Should the ACP be built through the Allegheny Highlands – anywhere, not just in Dave Blanchard's neighborhood – these assets would be significantly and permanently diminished. Tax revenues would be reduced because of real estate property values would be diminished (a dampening effect we are already experiencing), and tourism would surely be reduced.

The Recorder article discusses the mountaintop removal that would be necessary in just a portion of the ACP route, citing six specific locations where ridgetops would be reduced in height, in some cases by as much as 50 feet. In our larger area, more than 20 such locations have been identified so far as requiring mountaintop removal.

The serious impact of removing such ridgetops is twofold: 1) the negative visual impact it would have in altering scenic views would be significant; 2) the earth and rock removed from the ridgetops would seriously exacerbate the already major concern over erosion and sediment control associated with the project.

Dominion has so far been vague about how it intends to manage this problem. In fact, it has been unresponsive in providing necessary detail to the U.S. Forest Service for two such locations in the Monongahela National Forest. This does not bode well for one's confidence in the company's competence to build a natural gas pipeline in this area.

In short, a natural gas pipeline cannot be built through the Allegheny Highlands in a safe and reliable manner without a negative consequence, regardless of whose neighborhood is affected. It should not become some other neighborhood's problem, either.

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