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Legislators Call on DEQ to Protect Water, Fix Review Process for Two Proposed Natural Gas Pipelines

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Four state legislators from western Virginia in the past few days are the latest to join with a bi-partisan caucus calling on Gov. Terry McAuliffe and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to slow down, correct its process and ensure that water resources are protected from the impacts of the two major gas pipelines proposed through the region.

State Senators Emmett Hanger (R-Mount Solon) and Creigh Deeds (D-Hot Springs) and Delegates Dickie Bell (R-Staunton) and Sam Rasoul (D-Roanoke) teamed up on a [strong letter to DEQ Director David Paylor](#) and Virginia's State Water Control Board, asking to slow down the review process for the proposed Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines, and to use the state's full authority to protect their constituents' water.

Currently, the DEQ intends to defer its authority to review water body crossings to the Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit 12. Such action would not provide adequate individual review of each unique stream and wetland crossing or properly examine the impacts to underground water resources. Combined the two pipelines would cross water bodies in Virginia approximately 1,100 times.

The legislators noted that "Both pipelines pose some of the most significant threats to Virginia's water quality and aquatic environment in decades."

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In their letter, they also say:

“Our constituents are counting on the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the State Water Control Board (Water Board) to conduct a thorough and transparent review of stream and wetland crossings, as well as all upland activities, and ensure that Virginia water quality standards are met...”

“Why the rush? Protection of Virginia’s streams, rivers, and public and private water supplies is too important to place at risk. DEQ must take the time to ensure it has all necessary information, review that information, give the public an opportunity for thorough review, and then conduct a comprehensive and transparent analysis of critical water crossings and all related upland activities. Such an approach will allow DEQ to fulfill its responsibilities to protect the waterways of Virginia on which our constituents rely.”

“We applaud our local leaders for stepping up and asking for needed protections for valuable and vulnerable water supplies in their districts and across the state. We thank them for shining a spotlight on this issue that affects all Virginians from the mountains to the sea,” said Nancy Sorrells, co-chair of the Augusta County Alliance, an Allegheny Blue-Ridge Alliance member.

Senator John Edwards (D-Roanoke), Delegate Joseph Yost (R-Pearisburg), Delegate David Toscano, (D-Charlottesville), and Delegate Greg Habeeb (R-Salem) have made [similar requests of DEQ](#) since the fast-tracked review was announced in May, forming a block of bi-partisan legislators from western Virginia calling for a better process.

“DEQ’s actions are not only illogical and short-sighted, they are irresponsible. When it comes to water, Virginia has broad authority and obligation to citizens. Why in the world would Virginia choose not to use the authority granted under the Clean Water Act and instead defer to a federal check-the-box permit?” said Sorrells.

“It doesn’t have to be this way. It’s not too late to correct course and fully exercise Virginia’s clear authority to make sure our water resources are protected from the impacts of the pipelines.”

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