

# The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

2017-09-14 / Top News

## Alliance protests urgent pipeline request

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER



*A worker removes water from a pipeline trench. (Photo courtesy FERC)*

MONTEREY – A move to speed up the regulatory process by Dominion, Duke, and Southern received heavy criticism last week.

The companies asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Sept. 7 to approve the proposed pipeline by the end of the month so tree clearing can start in November.

An urgently toned letter to FERC chair Neil Chatterjee, commissioners Cheryl LaFleur and Robert F. Powelson from the proposed pipeline partners requested FERC “issue an order granting the certificate for the project at the earliest possible time, consistent with the rules and regulations of the commission.”

The letter said, “The commission staff issued the final Environmental Impact Statement for the project July 21, 2017. In the EIS, FERC staff concluded that the majority of impacts would be

reduced to less-than- significant levels with the implementation of ACP's proposed mitigation and the additional measures recommended in the EIS. We are pleased by the favorable findings in the EIS and have every confidence that the staff recommended conditions can be incorporated into our construction framework."

It was difficult to determine whether the sense of urgency was related to what climate change scientists have decided is a link between fossil fuels emissions and the strong hurricane season.

The request did not mention a U.S. Court of Appeals landmark Aug. 22 decision ordering FERC to write a second EIS of the Spectra (now Enbridge) Sabal Trail Pipeline, taking greenhouse gas emissions into account as integral to the pipeline overall environmental impact.

An alliance of citizen groups blasted Atlantic Coast Pipeline partners' eleventh-hour request for FERC to act sooner than later.

"What's clear is that the ACP partners are determined to line their pockets with no concern for community concerns or the state's regulatory process to ensure our water resources are protected," said Lewis Freeman, Allegheny Blue-Ridge Alliance chair and executive director. "This last-minute request ... is a blatant attempt to evade Virginia's regulatory process and ram the approval of this pipeline through, especially as community opposition continues to grow. The Virginia State Water Control board has not even yet scheduled its meeting to consider the pipeline, and here's Dominion and ACP partners attempting to do an end-run around the board. It raises serious questions about the motivation behind the ACP partners' push to rush the process — whether it's to undermine the water board, silence impacted community members, or sweep the widespread environmental, health, and safety risks under the rug."

Rather than deficiencies, the ACP partner utilities in their letter to FERC pointed to agencies, which, they claim, want the project to stay on schedule, plus purported economic benefits.

"Further, activities by other federal agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers and the National Park Service for permits and related authorizations remain on schedule. Similarly, state actions for section 401 Water Quality Certifications and other state requirements are proceeding and align with our anticipated construction schedule to begin tree clearing in November 2017," the letter urged.

The proposed ACP has commitments for 93 percent of the pipeline capacity, the companies said. "Of this amount, 68 percent of the supplies will serve the electric generation needs in North Carolina and Virginia, thereby improving regional air quality. In addition, 24 percent of ACP's capacity will provide expanded supplies of natural gas for local gas utilities to meet the critical needs of residential, commercial and industrial customers in gas constrained areas.

"Virginia Natural Gas, a gas distribution subsidiary of Southern Company Gas serving nearly 300,000 customers in Eastern Virginia, best exemplifies the urgency with this statement on the FERC docket: There is not currently enough interstate pipeline capacity to serve any substantial economic development east of Richmond, Virginia, and often throughout the heating season,

large transportation customers are adversely impacted by having their natural gas use restricted by operational flow orders issued from existing interstate pipelines,” the letter explained.

“Piedmont Natural Gas of North Carolina has documented similar critical needs: Increasing demand for natural gas in Piedmont’s rapidly growing Carolinas market is the primary driver for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which is the most competitively- priced option for our customers. Not only will ACP deliver the needed additional supplies to support customer growth, but it also will provide operational pressure critical to Piedmont’s physical infrastructures at strategic locations on its pipeline system. The significant natural gas pipeline also will create much needed economic development opportunities through a portion of North Carolina that historically has been economically challenged. The established record about the project confirms that natural gas delivered by ACP will enhance energy security and fuel diversity for the region,” it continued.

“The associated economic benefits are well documented as the project will bring over 17,000 new jobs in the construction industry, \$377 million in annual energy cost savings for customers and \$28 million in new, annual tax revenues for local governments along the pipeline route. These are only a few of the project’s benefits. Since ACP formally filed with FERC in September 2015 for permission to build the project, it has gained an expansive record of support from state and local governments, skilled craft labor organizations and leading business groups.

“We recognize the commission has a number of cases pending consideration with the restoration of quorum. The commission’s timely issuance of the order for the ACP project, however, is essential to meeting our contract obligations, ensuring customers realize the energy savings, providing manufacturing access to needed supplies of natural gas, and offering enhanced energy security and reliability to the region. For these reasons, we respectfully request that the commission issue an order approving the ACP certificate in September, so that the initial construction activities and tree clearing can begin in November and conclude in early 2018 as described in the final EIS.”

Signatories included Diane Leopold of Dominion, Franklin Yoho of Duke, and Andrew Evans of Southern.

ABRA further protested, “In this same letter, ACP partners tout that the project would bring new jobs in the construction industry, without noting that most of these jobs would be temporary and contracted to people outside of the states impacted by the 600-mile pipeline. These mega corporations are hoping that Virginians don’t realize that their talking points on jobs and their erroneous claims about the necessity of the pipeline have no basis in reality. We urge the FERC to deny this last-minute request, and instead, give the due diligence the public deserves and take the time to assess the need for and impacts of the ACP.”