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Groups demand feds scrap Dominion pipeline report

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — A coalition of North Carolina and Virginia public interest groups has petitioned the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to overturn its environmental report on Dominion Energy’s proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Impacts of greenhouse gases on the climate, and a plan to extend the ACP into South Carolina are central to the Oct. 9 motion.

The filing arrived on the eve of the Oct. 19 FERC meeting widely believed to mark construction approval and the administration’s scrapping of the Clean Power Plan.

The motion says FERC must take a “hard look” at new information, review it in the context of the application and current public comments, and then supplement the draft Environmental Impact Statement to incorporate the new information. “At the same time, the commission should rescind the draft EIS and hold the public comment period in abeyance until it issues the supplemental draft EIS. Lastly, the commission should require Dominion to file all additional supplemental information before proceeding further, with full disclosure of all plans to extend the pipeline into other states.”

Of the new information, “Dominion’s practice is to frequently supplement its application without regard for an orderly process, and by flaunting FERC and National Environmental Policy Act rules,” the motion states. “This has been supported by FERC in its failure to supplement its environmental documents, and allow public review and comment. The application was supplemented some 18 times after the comment period on the draft EIS was ended, and even another five times after the FEIS was issued.

“In light of the recent decision by the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals in *Sierra Club v. FERC* ... (August 22, 2017), FERC must revisit its impacts analysis in the EIS for the ACP and reopen the record for the purpose of taking additional evidence regarding greenhouse gas emissions and climate impacts, and issue a supplemental EIS,” the motion continued.

“As reported in an AP News Break story on Sept. 29, 2017, a Dominion official proclaimed to a gathering of energy officials and industrial recruiters in South Carolina that the ACP would expand into that state. As reported, Dan Weekley, Dominion Energy’s vice president and general manager of Southern pipeline operations, told attendees at a recent energy conference ‘everybody knows’ the Atlantic Coast Pipeline — currently slated to pass through Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina — is not going to stop there, despite what the current plans say.’

“Mr. Weekley went on to state the ACP would deliver 1 billion cubic feet per day to South Carolina. This new information, i.e., Dominion’s plans to extend the ACP into South Carolina, demonstrates the application for the ACP was intentionally misleading in terms of the scope of the project and the overall need for the project. The draft EIS should be supplemented to include the financial costs, environmental and socioeconomic costs, and environmental justice impacts from the South Carolina extension,” it stated.

“Additional shipment of natural gas in the pipeline will increase pressure within the pipeline, putting more pressure on compressor stations (including a new station required for North or South Carolina), and expanding the blast zones and evacuation zones,” the motion explained. “The new corridor will have many of the same environmental impacts as does the rest of the ACP, such as impacts on stream crossings, water quality, wildlife habitat, and farms and families. All of these impacts should be analyzed and presented for review and comment.

“The piece-mealing of projects – eliminating major components of a project from public scrutiny — is discouraged by NEPA. From a procedural standpoint, NEPA ‘provides the vehicle for agency (and public) consideration of overall project-related impacts prior to the permit decision. Ideally, EISs present comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, environmental impact and regulatory analysis.’”

In conclusion, the motion said, the environmental documents for the ACP are required to be supplemented, with the opportunity for public review and comment.

“Dominion continues to supplement its application and so far, FERC has sanctioned this practice ... The burden is on the commission to fully investigate the environmental risks and costs associated with the ACP, including all new and supplemental information. The new and late-filed information then becomes part of a draft EIS and it is then reviewed and commented on by other agencies and the public.”

Listed in the petition as public information groups are: North Carolina Waste Awareness and Reduction Network, Clean Water for North Carolina, the NC APPPL: Stop the Pipeline, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, and its chapters, Protect Our Water of Faber, Concern for the New Generation of Buckingham, Halifax and Northampton Concerned Stewards of Halifax and Northampton, N.C., Nash Stop the Pipeline of Spring Hope, N.C., Wilson County No Pipeline of Kenly, N.C., Sampson County Citizens for a Safe Environment of Faison, N.C., No Fracking In Stokes of Walnut Cove, N.C., Cumberland County Caring Voices of Eastover, N.C., Sustainable Sandhills, Beyond Extreme Energy, The Climate Times, N.C. Climate Solutions Coalition, Triangle Women’s International League, for Peace and Freedom; Haw River Assembly, Winyah Rivers Foundation Inc., River Guardian Foundation, 350.org Triangle, Eno

River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship – Earth Justice, the Chatham Research Group, and
ECOROBESON.