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National news cranks up pipeline coverage

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY – A high-level Dominion executive reportedly said the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline is likely destined for South Carolina. The proposed ACP probably will expand into South Carolina, the Associated Press on Sept. 29 reported the Dominion executive speculating.

Pipeline opposition groups pointed to the executive's remarks as an example of how investor-owned Dominion has enshrouded the proposal in a veil of vagueness since its announcement three and a half years ago.

The Associated Press acquired a recording of Dominion vice president and general manager of southern pipeline operations Dan Weekley tattling to industry conferees that "everybody knows" the pipeline will not terminate in southern North Carolina.

While Weekley's comments might be the clearest indication so far of Dominion's actual plans, the expansion idea is nothing new to industry experts, who have long predicted the proposed ACP's eventual extension into South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

Lew Freeman of Highlanders for Responsible Development told AP his constituency would respond, "I told you so."

In May 2015, The Recorder reported Dominion had purchased energy-hungry South Carolina's largest gas transmission system in February 2015 from SCANA, but there were no plans at that time to connect the proposed ACP.

SCANA, the state's leading investor-owned utility and the electric cooperatives serving much of the state, import almost all power plant fuel from out of state.

The 1,500-mile DCGT system's pipeline in Dillon County, S.C., is about 20 miles across the state line from the end of the proposed ACP in Robeson County, N.C. The DCGT system links to gas transmission along the coast and networks in Georgia.

Electric cooling and heating run most of the time in South Carolina, a state with long, hot summers and home to the Atlantic Coast resort destinations of Myrtle Beach, Charleston, and Hilton Head. Energy companies claim gas is cleaner than coal. Accordingly, coal power plants are being shut down and replaced by gas plants as a cheaper alternative to nuclear energy and with limited regard to true clean energy like solar.

For expansion to become official, Dominion would have to go through the same FERC process as the ACP. FERC spokeswoman Tamara Young-Allen said if the developers want to extend the pipeline into another state, they would have follow the full application process all over again.

Greg Buppert, an attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center, asked whether Dominion has actually planned all along to pump gas to South Carolina.

David Sligh of Wild Virginia told the AP the expansion talk supports arguments Dominion can't be trusted to be truthful about the project.

Dominion spokeswoman Jen Kostyniuk told the AP the company has not made a decision about expansion.

Dominion has repeatedly denied ACP gas would be exported overseas. None would go, for instance, to the company's new Cove Point, Md., export terminal, even though the proposed ACP would connect to a transmission system that is physically linked to the port. Dominion holds a 45-percent interest in the ACP, followed by Duke Energy, 40 percent; Piedmont Natural Gas, 10 percent; and Southern Company, 5 percent.

Central Electric Power Cooperative — provider for South Carolina's electric cooperatives that serve about half of the state including most coastal resort areas — began purchasing power from Duke in 2013. South Carolina business and industry leaders have been discussing the ACP with Dominion, the AP reported.