



## ABRA Update #242 – August 22, 2019

### ABRA Urges Forest Service to Restore Public Comments for All Projects

The Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance has voiced strong opposition to a U.S. Forest Service proposed rule that would effectively eliminate the opportunity for the public to provide comments on many projects proposed within the National Forests. The proposed rule, published in June, would amend agency procedures governing how environmental analyses are conducted for projects on Forest Service land in compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

When projects, such as a natural gas pipeline or a tree harvesting project are proposed, the agency decides whether it is appropriate to conduct an Environmental Assessment or prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, the latter being a more comprehensive analysis of the project's potential impacts. In either case, there is an opportunity for public comment. Under the Forest Service's NEPA procedures some projects, designated as so-called "categorical exclusions," are exempted from the public comment process. The rule that has been proposed would significantly expand the types of projects designated as "categorical exclusions," thus eliminating the requirement for public input.

In its [August 21 comments filed with the Forest Service](#), ABRA said:

The proposed rule, by expanding the use of "categorical exclusions," would eliminate the public comment process for many proposed uses of the national forests. Essentially, the Forest Service is saying to citizens with an interest in a proposed Forest project that the agency will decide whether their opinion is worth listening to. This proposed "don't call us, we'll call you" approach to future NEPA analyses represents a bureaucratic conceit that is contrary to the partnership with the public that the Forest Service has admirably practiced in the past.

The Forest Service should be encouraging increased public involvement, not blocking it as these proposed changes would do.

In an op-ed in the August 8 *New York Times* entitled "[Why is the Forest Service Trying to Evade the Public?](#)", Sam Evans of the Southern Environmental Law Center argued:

By eliminating the opportunity for public comment, the Forest Service is abandoning the chance to get meaningful advice for free. In the short run, the proposal will be bad for forest users, bad for wildlife and bad for local economies that depend on recreation. In the long run, it will hurt timber economies too. If the Forest Service abandons the process that makes this possible, it will undermine the cooperation that allows us to share our public lands.

ABRA Update readers are urged to submit comments about this wrong-headed proposal by clicking on [OurForestsOurVoice.org](#). The process is simple and straightforward. Be sure to act by Monday, August 26, 2019, the comment deadline for the proposed rule.

<p>Volunteer for ABRA's Pipeline CSI Program</p> <p><b><u>Volunteer</u></b></p>	<p>Submit a report to the Pipeline CSI</p> <p><b><u>Report</u></b></p>	<p>Stay informed, like us on Facebook.</p> 	<p>Support ABRA financially</p> <p><b><u>GiveNow</u></b></p>
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More details are available at <https://www.facebook.com/events/484749959009295/>.

## ***In the News:***

### **Local/Atlantic Coast Pipeline**

#### **In North Carolina, novel legal maneuver deployed against Atlantic Coast Pipeline**

- Energy News Network – 8/21/19

<https://energynews.us/2019/08/21/southeast/in-north-carolina-novel-legal-maneuver-deployed-against-atlantic-coast-pipeline/>

A little-known administrative rule allows state officials to cancel environmental certificates if conditions change.

#### **Rural Virginia activist, 75, vows to ‘keep on fighting’ Atlantic Coast Pipeline**

- Energy News Network – 8/20/19

<https://energynews.us/2019/08/20/southeast/rural-virginia-activist-75-vows-to-keep-on-fighting-atlantic-coast-pipeline/>

#### **With Hurricane Camille in mind, Nelson County worries about potential steep price for pipeline**

- Richmond Times-Dispatch – 8/16/19

<https://www.abralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/With-Hurricane-Camille-in-mind-Nelson-County-worries-about-potential-steep-price-for-pipeline-M.-Martz-RTD-8-16-19.pdf>

Friends of Nelson estimates that the pipeline route passes through or near 60 debris flows and 10 debris slides documented from Camille in a new state study.

## Renewable energy providers win skirmish against Dominion, but larger war drags on

- Virginia Mercury – 8/22/19

<https://www.virginiamercury.com/2019/08/22/renewable-energy-providers-win-skirmish-against-dominion-but-larger-war-drags-on/>

While the commission's ruling on the enrollments allows Direct Energy and Calpine to resume operations in Virginia, their fate will remain uncertain until the commissioners decide the outcome of a broader case determining what exactly "100 percent renewable energy" is and whether those companies are selling it.

## Regional/Mountain Valley Pipeline, other

### EPA signoff marks advance amid late permitting challenges for Mountain Valley Pipeline

- S&P Global – 8/19/19

<https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/081919-epa-signoff-marks-advance-amid-late-permitting-challenges-for-mountain-valley-pipeline>

US Army Corps of Engineers action is the next step for the water crossing permit to be reissued. Further legal challenges are expected.

### MVP Southgate natural gas pipeline targets Jordan Lake watershed, public meetings this week

- The Progressive Pulse – 8/19/19

<https://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2019/08/19/mvp-southgate-natural-gas-pipeline-targets-jordan-lake-watershed-public-meetings-this-week/>

Related:

- [https://www.godanriver.com/news/local/southgate-plan-draws-residents-to-speak-out/article\\_b703f3b3-542b-5bd5-bbdd-0131c2da4d52.html](https://www.godanriver.com/news/local/southgate-plan-draws-residents-to-speak-out/article_b703f3b3-542b-5bd5-bbdd-0131c2da4d52.html)

### North Carolina's Draft Energy Plan Aims to Curb Natural Gas Buildout

- Natural Gas Intelligence – 8/20/19

<https://www.naturalgasintel.com/articles/119336-north-carolinas-draft-energy-plan-aims-to-curb-natural-gas-buildout>

Related:

- <https://www.utilitydive.com/news/north-carolina-clean-energy-plan-could-reduce-power-sector-emissions-up-to/561261/>

### What Happens When People Meet the Gas Industry, Inside Appalachia

- WV Public Broadcasting – 8/16/19

<https://www.wvpublic.org/post/what-happens-when-people-meet-gas-industry-inside-appalachia#stream/0>

The economy of central Appalachia has long revolved around extractive industries: timber, coal, oil and natural gas. The jobs associated with these industries are often good paying jobs. They also can bring environmental and health issues to the region.

## Big Picture:

### Climate change could cost the U.S. up to 10.5 percent of its GDP by 2100, study finds

- Washington Post – 8/19/19

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2019/08/19/climate-change-could-cost-us-up-percent-its-gdp-by-study-finds/>

The study is unique in that it finds higher potential costs from climate change, particularly in the industrial world, compared with past research.

### Trump scheming to ship volatile liquid gas by train across U.S.

- People's World – 8/20/19

<https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/trump-scheming-to-ship-volatile-liquid-gas-by-train-across-us/>

Administration determined to give fossil fuel producers any and every advantage to make a buck. Damn the consequences.

### **Aging Infrastructure Poses Growing Safety Risks**

- Non Profit Quarterly – 8/20/19

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/aging-infrastructure-poses-growing-safety-risks/>

Explosions and accidents are all too common at aging facilities. Then again...natural gas pipelines, 10 years of age or less, are just as risky as those built in the 1920s.

### **A new tone from some Republicans on climate change — mostly behind closed doors**

- Politico – 8/22/19

<https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/22/climate-change-global-translations-1675710>

POLITICO's latest Global Translations podcast episode explores whether modest climate legislation could pass as soon as this year.

### **Opinion: We now have the technology to create a grid of cheap fully renewable electricity**

- Market Watch – 8/22/19

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/we-now-have-the-technology-to-create-a-grid-of-cheap-fully-renewable-electricity-2019-08-22>

All that's missing is the political will.

### **Renewable energy has space to grow**

- Physics World – 8/20/19

<https://physicsworld.com/a/renewable-energy-has-space-to-grow/>

A fully-renewable energy system doesn't require damaging our remaining wild spaces. We've messed up enough land already to more than supply our needs!

### **America's mega-emitters are starting to close**

- E&E News – 8/16/19

<https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060965553>