

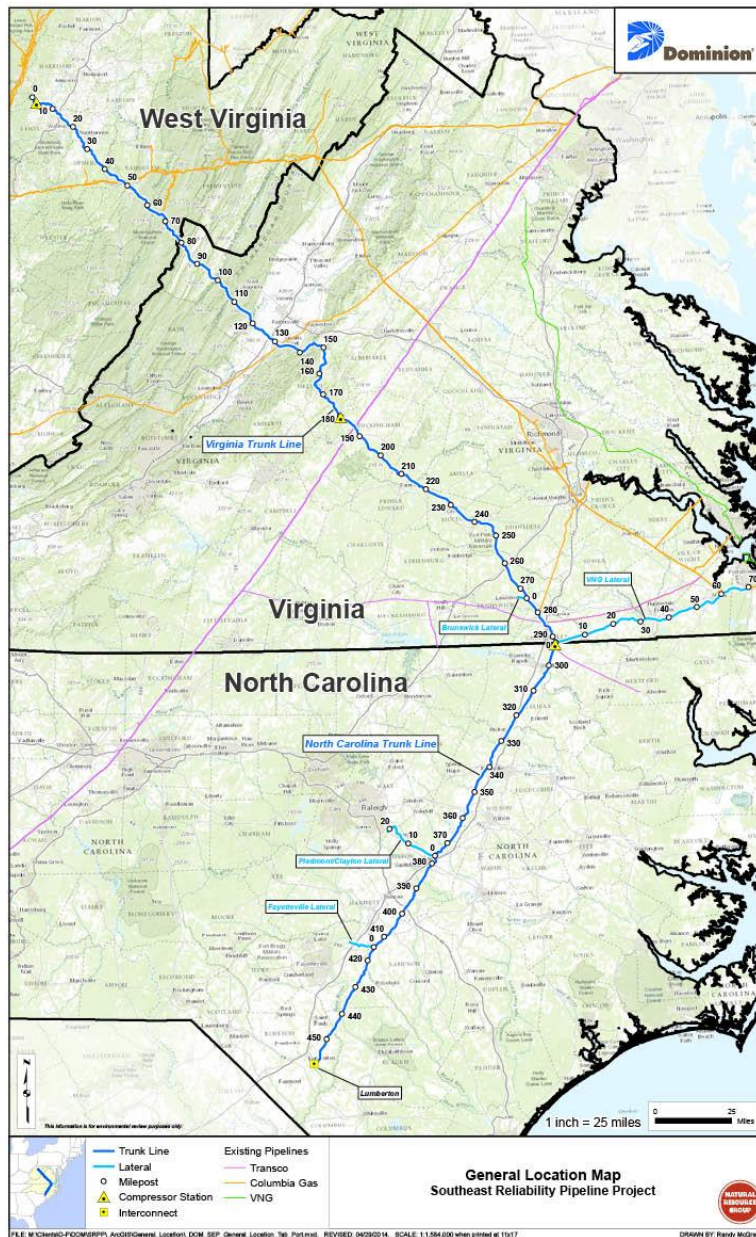
The Recorder

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Proposed pipeline would run through Highland

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By Anne Adams, Staff Writer



MONTEREY — Dominion power company is proposing a \$4 billion project to run a natural gas pipeline from West Virginia to North Carolina, and part of it would traverse Highland County.

According to information provided to Highland’s board of supervisors, Dominion Resources Inc. “is pursuing a natural gas pipeline project, to be known as the Southeast Reliability Project. Our proposed project would deliver some of the abundant natural gas supplies from the Marcellus and Utica shale basins to serve existing and growth markets for energy in the Mid-Atlantic region.”

“Holy cow,” said supervisor Kevin Wagner Friday. “What else can you say?”

The board doesn’t know much, Wagner said, “but we’re hoping for a delegation to come here and tell us what our role is in this. It could be good, but it could be really dramatic for people who’s property this crosses ... we’re just overwhelmed; we don’t know how this would play out.”

Dominion anticipates construction in 2017 and 2018, with service online by the end of 2018.

Dominion’s “talking points” provided to the board are:

- “As this winter demonstrated, pipeline constraints in several regions of the United States are a key energy policy and economic development challenge. Natural gas is a low-carbon, low-emissions fuel that is increasingly used in power generation, home heating and manufacturing. An adequate supply of natural gas is a key driver in a community’s ability to attract economic development. It is the energy equivalent of broadband infrastructure.”
- This project will improve gas supply for Mid-Atlantic markets, “thereby promoting price stability and enhancing economic opportunity.”
- “This much needed natural gas infrastructure will (1) better serve existing customer demand, (2) improve service reliability and (3) allow for customer growth and economic development along the route.”
- The project “will produce substantial economic benefits, including a substantial number of well-paying construction jobs and additional tax base in communities along the route.”
- Dominion would work with a wide range of stakeholders “to ensure that the Southeast Reliability Project gives careful consideration to land conservation, historic preservation, and other key policy considerations. Accordingly, we will perform survey, cultural resource and environmental studies along the proposed route. Meeting applicable regulatory requirements will take up to two years.”

The letter to the board said, “Dominion looks forward to working with you to ensure that we can optimize the balance of environmental stewardship and economic opportunity that is created by the Southeast Reliability Project investment. We welcome your questions and input.”

The board also received a map, plus a draft letter to property owners who could be affected, explaining the surveying that would take place on their land.

It explains to a landowner, “Typically, the first step in a new project is to conduct surveys and environmental studies along a potential route corridor. Your property has been identified as being in this corridor and that is why we are notifying you so that we can begin keeping you informed throughout this process and because surveys will be conducted on your property. Conducting these surveys and environmental studies is required as part of the permitting process for a project of this nature. The Commonwealth of Virginia encourages new projects such as the Southeast Reliability project to conduct these studies as a way to minimize environmental and land use impacts. Dominion plans to begin the surveys and studies on or about July 1, 2015.”

Further, it tells a landowner, “Please be aware that our surveying the route does not mean you are agreeing to access for construction of the pipeline. For that purpose, we will seek a separate easement agreement from all affected property owners prior to construction once a final route is selected at the end of this process. During the initial phase and any subsequent phases of the Southeast Reliability pipeline project, Dominion and its representatives will remain in contact with you through other mailings, phone and in-person information sessions to keep you informed and to answer any questions you may have.”

It directs landowners to sign the form and return it to Dominion.

It also explains Doyle Land Services Inc. would assist with the project.

“We take pride in our long history of working closely with all landowners and neighbors who may be affected during project planning and construction and even after our projects are completed. We are confident that you will see this commitment to property owners reflected in every contact you have with Dominion and its representatives.”

Information provided notes that parent company Dominion owns and operates 11,000 miles of natural gas transmission pipelines located in Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Maryland. “We also operate one of the nation’s largest underground natural gas storage systems. In addition to the corporate headquarters being located in Richmond, our sister company, Dominion Virginia Power, is the state’s largest electric utility, with approximately 2.4 million customers.”

County supervisors informed the planning commission of the project last night (Thursday). “The said holy cow, too,” Wagner said. “There might be nothing we can do. It’s going to sock us.”

Watch next week’s Recorder for more details on what this all means.