

# The Recorder

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## Use of existing corridors asked at scoping meetings

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BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER



A common theme of speakers at the FERC scoping meeting was use of existing utility corridors. This one crosses Jack Mountain in Highland. (Recorder photo by John Bruce)

ELKINS, W.Va. — Federal regulators wrapped up a series of scoping meetings in West Virginia Monday, in preparation for an environmental impact statement on the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

The session appeared to be much more lightly attended than its predecessors in Virginia last week, with about 150 people in attendance, filling about half of the high school auditorium.

It was the ninth of 10 meetings, with the final meeting Tuesday on the company's proposed supply header project.



Kevin Bowman of FERC presided. (Recorder photo by John Bruce)

The meeting was one of the two closest to Highland, with the other taking place last week in Stuarts Draft. Of the few Highlanders attending was Bill Rich of the planning commission, who was there to observe.

Opening the meeting was Kevin Bowman, environmental scientist with FERC. He reviewed the environmental assessment process and explained FERC was reviewing applications of Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Dominion, and that the session was not a public hearing but a means of listening to citizens' concerns.

The scoping period that began Feb. 27 and ends April 28 will not mark the end of accepting comments, but Bowman asked for written comments to be submitted by April 28 just to be sure they are included in the analysis.



Allen Johnson described West Virginia as an "industrial sacrifice" and said residents had the worst health of any state for eight years in a row. (Recorder photo by John Bruce)

Bowman said the pre-filing process is considered an extension of the scoping process and is a way of gathering information from the applicant, state and federal agencies, and the public. He said the environmental impact statement would address all environmental, socioeconomic and cultural impacts. A draft EIS will be issued for a comment period with similar meetings. The staff will then prepare a final EIS for consideration by federal commissioners.

The EIS is not a decision making document, Bowman said, but merely considered in making a determination of the project.

On Dec. 12, 2014, Dominion and ACP filed preliminary reports about the proposed 42-inch pipeline for 1.5 million cubic feet of natural gas per day and smaller laterals, Bowman said.

In opening the floor to speakers, Bowman announced there would be a five-minute time limit.

During the first hour, there were eight speakers opposed and four in support. Those who opposed the pipeline tended to speak longer than those in support, who, for the most part, followed Dominion's talking points claiming economic benefits.

The first speaker, Richard Laska of Allegheny Mountain, said for many, the pipeline would be more of a public nuisance than public necessity. He called for the applicants to consider using existing utility corridors instead of a new one, a theme that was shared by other speakers. He recommended FERC hold a public hearing to assess public sentiment about the proposal.

Laska was followed by Chad Earle, who said his company hired 70 people because of the natural gas industry. He said the 500- plus people required for the proposal might be temporary but would still be important jobs. Of safety concerns, he said redundancies are built into the equipment and skilled tradesmen would be working on the project.

Autumn Bryson, an environmental scientist and member of the Greenbrier Watershed Association, said all alternatives need to be evaluated and it was FERC's responsibility to evaluate them as well as existing corridors. She said FERC should consider evaluating and avoiding sensitive areas, karst, increased sedimentation as well as the potential impact on outdoor recreation and tourism. She asked how many acres of forest would be fragmented and that fragmentation's affect on wildlife, water sources, fisheries, water quality, fish species and flooding. How would pipeline construction impact cultural resources and tree species such as declining red spruce, air quality, threatened and endangered species and property values?

Allen Johnson, president of Eight Rivers Council, described West Virginia as an "industrial sacrifice" and said residents had the worst health of any state for eight years in a row. He said the ACP would not generate direct resources to Pocahontas County, and called for a county-by-county evaluation of losses. It was immoral and irresponsible for Dominion to exercise eminent domain, Johnson said. "We are to suffer so others outside might gain," he said.

Catherine Parker said she was concerned that Dominion's preferred route crossed Monongahela National Forest. She asked if a Dominion spokesman really believed the proposed pipeline would be invisible. She said it was FERC's responsibility to take a "large, longitudinal view."

Simply having a customer on the other end is not justification for the proposal, she said.

Greg Hefner, representing First Energy and Harrison County Economic Development Corp., said the pipeline would provide a new route for Marcellus Shale gas and continued development of resources was essential. “Dominion is a good corporate neighbor,” he said.

Robin Leshler of Pocahontas County said the proposed pipeline was “important to our county and the entire country.”

Carla Beaudet said she objected all proposed routes because existing rights of way have not been considered. She said using eminent domain was wrong. The owners of existing rights of way have better lawyers than private landowners, she added. She refuted claims the pipeline right of way would be mowed and said aerial herbicide application would poison the eight rivers that form in the area.

Mickey and George Deike, owners of the 1,000-acre Shalimar Farm equestrian retreat, spoke in opposition. Mrs. Deike cited more than 7,000 gas explosions and \$6.8 million in property damage. “This is a very bad idea, folks,” she said. Mr. Deike said building through karst topography was problematic because the water flows are unpredictable. He said in Virginia, on Jack Mountain, there are 10 of miles of caves and if disturbed, it would be impossible to tell whose well would dry up.

Blaire Hollis felt Dominion says it will do the right thing, but where it does not, the public is left to pick up the pieces. “Let’s call it what it is, a land grab,” she said. She pleaded to FERC to seek alternative routes.

Don Nester of the Oil and Gas Association of West Virginia, asked for approval of the proposed pipeline in support for jobs, direct workers and those who support them.