

# Dominion's 5,000 page FERC response

Patricia Borns

[pborns@newsleader.com](mailto:pborns@newsleader.com)

RICHMOND—Quicker than you can say Atlantic Coast Pipeline, Dominion dropped 5,400 pages of reports on the Federal Regulatory Commission's desk Tuesday evening for the agency and public to ponder.

The reports, which are part of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline vetting process, came earlier than expected. Just last week Dominion gave FERC its responses to some 28,000 comments, including many from Augusta and Nelson County residents.

That document left many questions unanswered because of the type of filing process FERC allowed the energy company to use.

At Dominion's request, the federal agency approved a prefiling process, meaning the company could address comments about the project before the formal application is made — when the real route and construction details will be known.

## **"This will be covered later ..."**

Many of Dominion's responses deferred to 12 reports, all of which the company made available Tuesday night. If people felt they were getting vague answers before, they have details now.

You might want to start with the [response document](#) — it's pipeline lite compared with the reports' detail — then dig into the specifics you care about the most.

## Related story: Dominion shifts proposed pipeline route through county?

Two alternative routes in Augusta County announced Monday are included in the new documents. Neither the short responses nor the technical reports represent for certain what the formal application will contain.

"It's mostly canned, non-specific responses," said Nancy Sorrells, co-chair of Augusta County Alliance, after reading them. The group is a vocal opponent of Dominion's pipeline plan.

But Dominion did answer some questions directly, including one Sorrells posed.

### **Open trenches during construction**

She asked if Dominion would sign a waiver saying it won't open more than 500 feet of trench as it lays its pipeline through Augusta County. Virginia law calls for no more than 500 feet to be open at one time to prevent too much polluted runoff from entering the groundwater system.

Dominion answered it will seek variances to the law as needed.

It assured other commenters it will not fill the trenches it digs with coal ash. It will put the same material it excavated back on the ground. And it will make its inspection documents public.

### **Water contamination**

Dominion admitted groundwater levels and quality, as well as private wells near the construction, could be affected during blasting. It offered to test private well water before and after construction if owners desire, but not to compensate them for any problems.

The county's Board of Supervisors wanted to know if blasting would occur near flood control dams. The pipeline crosses two such dams in Augusta County: the Waynesboro Nursery Dam and Tom's Branch.

Dominion expects it will need to blast at Tom's Branch, as well as about 75 percent of the pipeline route. You can now learn more about the company's blasting plans in the [geology report](#).

Responding to a U.S. Forest Service comment about the need to analyze long-term impacts of the pipeline on water contamination, Dominion said there won't be any.

The assurance that it will skirt karst features and water supplies within certain distances — 400 feet from the municipal water supply, 200 feet from landowner wells — likely won't be enough to assure local landowners and officials.

A more specific report on [water use and quality](#) has now been filed.

### **Building on karst**

Dominion said it will protect water sources and karst features within 100 feet of the pipeline, and won't transfer liquids near them.

"The 100-foot buffer is a best management practice required by the FERC," spokesman Frank Mack said. "We would be treating the karst terrain just like a waterbody or any other environmentally sensitive area."

Alliance members aren't satisfied. "In a karst environment, that's nothing," Sorrells said. "Something that happens a mile away can affect people's water because of the way the underground structure is."

The response assures that Dominion has the capability to build in a karst environment, citing hundreds of miles of similar construction in Ohio.

The geological resources report explains how the company will deal with karst geology, as well as its plans for blasting.

## **Environmental impact**

More than one commenter observed the ACP is one of four existing and planned pipelines in the region, including Mountain Valley Pipeline, Columbia WB Xpress Pipeline and Appalachian Connector Pipeline projects.

Shouldn't the total greenhouse gas emissions and their effect on climate change be calculated, some commenters asked.

No, Dominion responded, the projects should be considered on their own merits because they're not "connected actions."

Yes, FERC spokeswoman Tamara Young-Allen said Monday, there will be a cumulative Environmental Impact Statement.

## **Impacts on the Appalachian Trail and Blue Ridge Parkway**

Dominion will use a trenchless drilling method to route the pipeline under the Appalachian Trail and Blue Ridge Parkway, but it can't use that technique all the way through, according to Jim Norvelle, a spokesman for Dominion.

Trees will be removed and replaced with low-growing vegetation for an unspecified portion of these areas.

Norvelle said some outward views would inevitably be affected. "We will conduct a visual impact analysis of the crossing to assess potential impacts on views to and from the trail." he said.

Owners of salable timber removed on private lands along the pipeline route will be compensated, the company said.

## **Overwhelming project support?**

Dominion filed its responses with a letter of endorsement from Consumer Energy Alliance, a nongovernmental agency whose members include 90 energy providers and suppliers, including Dominion.

Close to 22,000 of the comments received by FERC came from signers of a CEA petition.

On that basis, Dominion prefaced its responses with a table showing overwhelming support for the pipeline.

A FERC spokesperson said such petitions are common on big energy projects, but dismissed their importance to FERC's evaluation and approval of the project.

"This isn't American Idol," she said.

FERC continues to accept comments from agencies and the public about the ACP project. To comment, visit <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/QuickComment.aspx>. Be sure to include the pipeline's docket number, PF15-6, when submitting your remarks.