



Issue: The Atlantic Coast Pipeline

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline (the “ACP”) is an approximately 600-mile unidirectional, underground 42-inch diameter interstate natural gas transmission pipeline to transport fracked Marcellus-Utica shale gas from West Virginia, through Virginia, and ending in North Carolina. A map of the pipeline can be found at

<https://dom.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Viewer/index.html?appid=ccfd1990e87649d79e7c94fd5e73c2b7>.

Four energy corporations – Dominion Energy, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas Company, and Southern Company Gas – are behind the approximately \$5.2 billion proposed pipeline, with Dominion as the driving force.

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline crosses the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains from West Virginia to North Carolina, and would require the cutting of a permanently maintained 75-100 ft. swath through 16 miles of the George Washington National Forest (“GWNF”) in Highland, Bath, and Augusta counties in Virginia. A road would likely parallel the pipeline. This long, wide industrial zone would severely degrade some of the best remaining, least altered natural landscapes in the Eastern U.S., contained in the GWNF.

Its proposed route will run through environmentally fragile land, threaten land values and nearby residents, and potentially involve mountain ridgeline reduction. Opponents claim abuse of eminent domain laws for private gain and argue that the ACP is not needed to meet regional energy demands, but is rather an attempt to raise profits to please shareholders. Powerful interests behind the ACP have made it challenging for opponents to have their voices heard. Such interests include, Dominion Energy, the biggest stakeholder in the ACP, which is a huge economic and political powerhouse in Virginia and beyond. The company and its powerful CEO have used their deep pockets and political ties to advance their interests around the pipeline. Dominion and its surrogates have deployed a band of private lobbyists who have backgrounds in government. State politicians in Virginia and North Carolina who have been publicly vocal about their support for the pipeline have been some of the biggest recipients of donations from its corporate backers. In addition, key members of regulatory boards tasked with approving the pipeline in Virginia have backgrounds that raise conflict of interest concerns. For example, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality’s Water Permitting Division Director was once a lawyer for Dominion, according to minutes from a county board meeting.

Dominion Resources represents that the pipeline that would serve multiple public utilities and their growing energy needs in Virginia and North Carolina. Atlantic, a company formed by four major, regionally based energy companies; Dominion Energy, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas and Southern Company Gas, would develop, construct and operate ACP. They claim the pipeline would support over 17,000 jobs during construction, 2,200 operation jobs, would provide lower cost energy and cleaner air.

On July 21, 2017, the FERC issued a “**Final Environmental Impact Statement**”¹ for the controversial Atlantic Coast Pipeline, concluding that the 600-mile pipeline’s impact on the environment would be reduced to “less-than-significant” levels if the developers follow 71 mitigation measures noted in its final order approving the pipeline. With FERC’s favorable review, the pipeline is a big step closer to the start of construction. Dominion Energy must receive state water permits and then wait for FERC to issue its final decision.

While not surprised by the favorable report, environmental groups criticize FERC’s conclusion that the project would have “less-than-significant” impacts on the environment. The ACP has raised intense opposition from environmentalists and communities that stand to be impacted by it and environmental groups have challenged FERC’s conclusion that the project would have “less-than-significant” impacts on the environment by providing a detailed analysis of its negative impacts on forests and waterways. Many have found FERC’s assessment of potential climate pollution by the ACP

¹ FERC Staff Issues Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Supply Header Project (CP15-554-000, -001; CP15-555-000; and CP15-556-000) Issued: July 21, 2017



as woefully inadequate. FERC did not consider pollution due to fracking emissions, downplayed methane leakage, and wrongly assumed gas will replace coal when it increasingly displaces clean energy, Oil Change International research analyst Kelly Trout said in a statement. Oil Change International found that the ACP will cause 68 million metric tons of greenhouse gas pollution per year, which is the equivalent of 20 U.S. coal plants or over 14 million vehicles on the road. The study applied a gas pipeline climate methodology that adds up the life-cycle pollution of shale gas extracted from the Appalachian Basin.

The Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA, a coalition of 51 organizations, founded in September 2014, that opposes the proposed ACP) has stated that the commission's environmental impact statement reveals significant gaps in information and woefully inadequate analysis, which is no surprise based on the agency's historic rubber-stamp approach to virtually all natural gas interstate pipelines. Shortcomings include a failure to assess the true market demand for natural gas in the region of the proposed pipeline; take a hard look at the effects the proposed route planned through predominantly minority and low-income neighborhoods would have on communities; consider the devastation to mountaintops construction would have across steep, forested Appalachian ridges; and provide adequate environmental information regarding its potential environmental impacts on a wide variety of resources, including water resources, wetlands, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species and climate change implications.

Despite the positive environmental review, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline is not a done deal. All three states through which the pipeline would travel—West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina—are still reviewing the project's impacts to water resources.

Opponents of the pipeline may have an uphill battle due to support for the ACP by groups such as "[Your Energy America](#)", a front group created in May 2017 by the American Gas Association (AGA) to promote natural gas use and undermine environmental advocacy campaigns against new natural gas pipelines and infrastructure. [Your Energy America](#) is pushing Dominion Energy's Atlantic Coast natural gas pipeline.

The ACP is supported by governor McAuliffe because it will create jobs for Virginia. It is also supported by the 2017 Republican gubernatorial nominee Ed Gillespie and it is not clear where the 2017 Democratic gubernatorial candidate Ralph Northam stands on the issue. While speaking on the John Fredericks Radio Show on Thursday July 20, 2017, when a reporter reached out to Northam for a comment, communications director David Turner said his stance remains the same. "Dr. Northam has always said he wants DEQ's evaluation to be rigorous, based in science, transparent, and to make sure that Virginia takes care of people's property rights". "He believes the facts should dictate the outcome, and his position has not changed." ²

The original targeted in-service date for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project was late 2018. Dominion Energy now expects the pipeline will begin serving customers in early 2019.

² <http://wydaily.com/2017/07/13/did-gubernatorial-candidate-ralph-northam-embrace-atlantic-coast-pipeline-it-depends-on-who-you-ask-nws/>