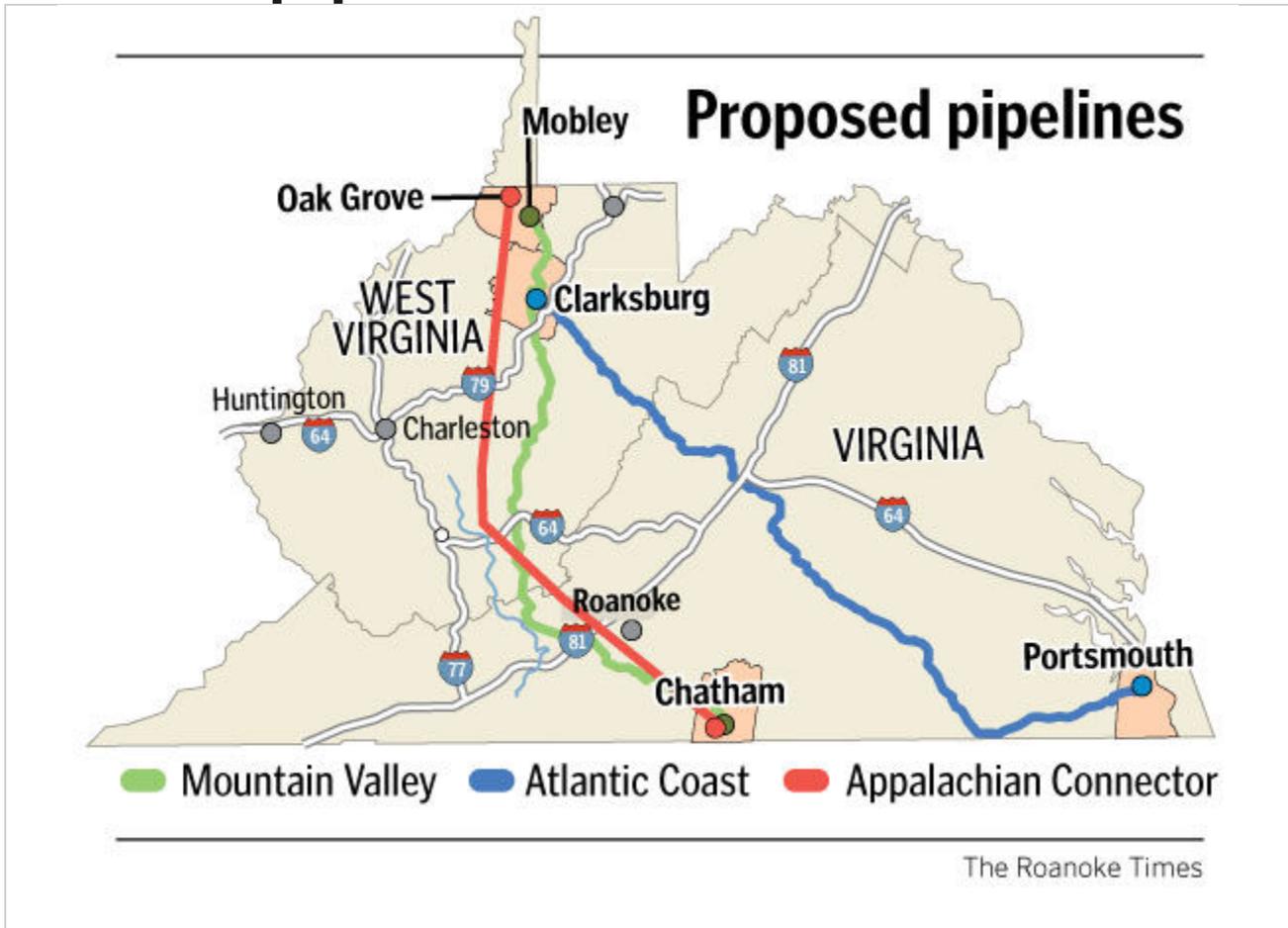


Belleville: Trail guardians worried about pipelines



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For the past 90 years, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy has served as a guardian of the nearly 2,200-mile Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Today, we are faced with one of the most challenging threats ever to the integrity of the trail: a series of proposals to build new petroleum pipeline corridors across the trail to transport natural gas. We want to offer additional points for consideration relevant to the article "[Landowner rights vs. public need](#)" (Nov. 9 news story).

We are specifically concerned about the cumulative impact of the significant number of pipelines being proposed across Appalachian National Scenic Trail landscapes. Some of these landscapes are public lands and others are private. Regardless of land ownership, we need to take a critical look at the overall impacts to these lands from this modern day "gas rush."

There are 10 active proposals to develop gas pipelines that will cross the world-famous Appalachian Trail. Three of these are in Virginia: the Mountain Valley Pipeline, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Spectra Energy Pipeline. We expect that the total number of proposals to cross the trail will at least double in 2015. *Double.* This is our best guess because there does not appear to be any overarching coordination of these new lines. Coordination is needed to avoid, or at least minimize, impacts to our landscapes and protect critical resources like the Appalachian Trail and other national treasures.

The cumulative impact of proposed and yet-to-be-proposed pipelines can be difficult to determine. But for perspective, one 2011 study by The Nature Conservancy, "Pennsylvania Energy Impacts Assessment," analyzed Pennsylvania's existing network of large-diameter natural gas pipelines. The study concluded that development of new pipelines will at least double, possibly even quadruple, over the next two decades. The study indicated that between 120,000 and 300,000 acres will be affected by natural gas pipeline construction, an area larger than that affected by all other Marcellus gas infrastructure combined (i.e. well pads, roads, water containment and staging/storage areas).

While the pipelines in a gas producing state like Pennsylvania should be denser than in Virginia and other areas that will primarily host transport lines, we simply have very little information on the impacts from extensive transport lines. We have grave concerns that we will only know the true negative effect on our lands — recreation, forests, watersheds — after the lines have been installed, when it is too late.

Domestic energy sources along with energy conservation strategies are essential. How do we balance the need for energy with protecting our lands? Certainly some places are just too important to protect to allow this type of development. It is imperative that we find the best, most thoughtful, approach to site new energy infrastructure.

To accomplish this we need better national energy planning and policies, as well as a high level of coordination among all levels of government. And as a community, we need to be mindful of rushing into an economic gas boom. With unregulated booms come busts. Surely we have been there, haven't we?