

Still concerned about proposed pipeline

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Although Dominion has kept details about the “Southeast Reliability Project,” a natural gas pipeline that would cross Augusta and Highland counties, quite vague, it is clear the construction and maintenance of such large-scale industrial pipeline would have devastating consequences for the environment. There are many reasons the Sierra Club in Virginia opposes the project.

The pipeline will cross through nearly 50 miles of hardwood forests of the Monongahela and George Washington National Forests, threatening wildlife, water quality, and recreation. If the pipeline is built, gas producers will argue that drilling wells in the George Washington National Forest makes sense given the proximity of a distribution line. New wells and fracking will endanger the unique qualities of this magnificent Appalachian forest and further threaten clean water.

The pipeline would cross and blight the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail, two of Virginia’s great natural tourist attractions. It will also cross a portion of the McDowell Battlefield and other historically significant sites in the Commonwealth.

The pipeline would not be totally underground and invisible as some believe. There would be cuts and disturbance of the natural environment. Warning signs, valves, crossings, service roads, and compressor stations would scar the landscape.

In just Highland and Augusta counties, the pipeline would cross dozens of streams and rivers including the Bullpasture, the Cowpasture, and, depending on the actual route, the waters (or headwaters) of the Middle and South rivers. In Virginia, the trunkline and laterals would cross an astonishing 448 bodies of water plus wetlands. Every cut promises increased erosion, runoff, sediment and potential pollution.

Our farmlands, forests, and conservation easements will be marked forever. Passing through the limestone topography typical in western Virginia, the pipeline may fall victim to sink holes or natural caves that could cause leaks or a catastrophic failure.

More reliance on natural gas will increase greenhouse gas pollution from Virginia power plants. Exports of natural gas will increase energy costs at home and greenhouse gas emissions abroad. At a time when we need to take significant steps to reduce global warming, Dominion-Virginia Power is proposing a 22 to 37 percent increase of greenhouse gas emissions over the next 15 years.

Instead of trying to apply 19th century solutions to our energy needs, we should be building the energy economy of the future. Other countries and some states are successfully demonstrating that a combination of energy efficiency and renewable energies can reduce energy costs, improve the quality of life, and reduce threats to our health and property caused by global warming. Dominion's proposal is a giant step backwards that puts company profits ahead of the health and wells being of Virginia and the rest of the world.

We are adamantly opposed to Dominion's proposed pipeline because it poses threats to our environment, the region's natural and cultural history, and our way of life that cannot be reduced or mitigated by slight changes to the route.

Tom Long is a Mount Solon resident and a member of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club