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Pipeline environmental infractions on upswing

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — Despite cutbacks in drilling activity, water pollution violations from the rush to build shale gas pipelines have grown this year.

A citizens group questions why damage to drinking water supplies would not continue to escalate with the expected federal approvals of the proposed Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley interstate pipelines.

West Virginia regulators have charged the contractor of a pipeline project at the heart of the shale gas infrastructure that would serve the proposed ACP and MVP with at least a dozen pollution offenses. Wisconsin-based Precision Pipeline LLC polluted streams with sediment laden water, erosion controls in need of maintenance, fill material entering delineated wetlands, and by failing to follow best management practices, according to the state department of environmental protection.

One violation notice said the company “failed at all times (to) properly operate and maintain all facilities and systems of treatment and control. Specifically, perimeter controls were observed to be nonfunctional and/or in need of maintenance in multiple locations.”

Similar to violations Dominion faced last fall, the recent pollution offenses have received attention across the state line because they refer to construction activity upstream from Dominion’s proposed ACP.

But unlike the ACP and MVP, the Stonewall Pipeline Project, under permit of Stonewall Gathering LLC that is part of the Appalachian Gathering system designed for future connection to the ACP, is not regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission because it does not cross a state line.

For the proposed ACP, Dominion plans to file with FERC later this month to proceed with environmental permitting as well as the right to exercise eminent domain.

A citizens group cited “a lack of concern for proper installation, operation, and maintenance of basic erosion and sediment control measures” on the part of the pipeline contractor.

“There is no reason to believe it will be any different for the other, larger pipelines,” said Rick Webb of the Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition, in a website posting titled “Stream Zero,” referring to the Stonewall Pipeline Project and the proposed ACP and MVP interstate pipelines.

Together, they would extend a total of more than 850 miles from a convergence point in West Virginia to carry fossil fuel to electric power plants in Virginia and North Carolina. Each of the proposed interstate pipelines would measure 11 feet in circumference over much of the distances they would cross.

“The inevitable impact of these converging pipelines on the environment and people in one small area serves to emphasize the risk associated with the current rush to build more and larger pipelines for shale-gas transmission,” Webb said. “Critical questions concerning optimal siting, potential co-location, cumulative impact, and regulatory capability have not been answered. Each project is instead planned and constructed as a

separate and independent activity. Conservation groups, concerned citizens, and elected officials have called on FERC to conduct a comprehensive assessment before authorizing the multiple big interstate pipelines proposed for moving shale gas across the Appalachian Mountains.”

Access www.pipelineupdate.org/ to view “Stream Zero” in its entirety.

Last October, Dominion agreed to comply with an administrative consent order after West Virginia’s environmental regulators cited multiple water pollution law violations spanning nine waterways in three counties, following a string of gas and oil pipeline investigations over three years.

Following a request for the company’s response, a Dominion spokesman told The Recorder that during the West Virginia construction projects, the company failed “to meet its own expectations,” but it plans to follow the order and refrain from future violations.