

# Unwise pipeline calls for people power

By Robert N. Whitescarver

The tidal wave of corporate greed and power continues to grow. Duke Energy, Dominion Power and now the governor of Virginia are all behind the construction of a 550-mile, 42-inch natural gas pipeline. Called the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, it would run across the Allegheny Mountains, through the Great Valley of Virginia, then across the Blue Ridge to the Atlantic.

Why? In Dominion's words, "We are wholesalers of gas, we just move gas around." The company wants to move fracked gas from its source in West Virginia to its customers, wherever they might be.

In my opinion, "For export."

It's a \$5 billion project.

The pipeline should not be built. It's dangerous and "The People" don't want it.

The Valley of Virginia is underlain by a geologic formation called karst. Karst terrain is formed when water dissolves the minerals beneath the soil to form sinkholes and caverns. The Earth's surface caves in or subsides forming depressions in the landscape called sinkholes. These cave-ins can leave pipes suspended across chasms underground, sometimes causing them to rupture. It is very difficult to find a route through the Valley of Virginia that does not go through karst terrain.

The route Dominion has chosen goes through Augusta County, the widest part of the karst formation in the Valley. At least 30 known sinkholes exist in the direct path of the proposed pipeline.

According to Virginia's Hazard Mitigation Plan of 2013, "pipeline infrastructure, underlain by karst terrain, can be damaged by a collapse in the supporting soil."

Augusta County has a high incidence of soil subsidence resulting from this active geologic formation. The Virginia Department of Transportation had to shut down Interstate 81 in 2011 because a sinkhole opened. I've seen sinkholes open up in Augusta County that could swallow an 18-wheeler.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, in 2012 alone there were 80 natural gas pipeline explosions and fires nationwide. Since 2001, there have been 45 deaths from natural gas pipeline explosions.

Have we learned nothing from the San Bruno pipeline explosion near San Francisco in 2010 that wiped a neighborhood off the map? It leveled three-dozen houses and killed eight people. The explosion created a 72-foot crater and threw a 3,000-pound section of pipe 100 feet. This was a 30-inch pipe. Dominion proposes to put a 42-inch pipe from West Virginia to the Atlantic Ocean.

A natural gas pipeline through this type of active geology is not wise and lacks concern for human life. Dominion should put their \$5 billion into solar power or into ways to increase energy efficiencies.

The pipeline would go through the Monongahela and George Washington National Forests, the Blue Ridge Parkway (a National Park) and across the Appalachian Trail (a National Scenic Trail).

It would have up to a 200-foot construction right-of-way through national forests and a National Park. The aftermath would be a 75-foot permanently cleared easement on which no trees are allowed. That equates to nine acres of lost farm and forest for every mile of pipeline – 4,950 acres for this pipeline.

Blasting would be inevitable because of all the rocks. Dominion has said as much. This means clear-cutting, forest fragmentation and risk to water resources affecting millions of people.

But the people against the pipeline are even more upset about the erosion of their rights and the devaluation of their property. Dominion has the right to enter our property without our permission and, if the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approves the pipeline, the company can take your property rights through eminent domain. The former was granted under Virginia's Wagner Act in 2004, and the latter under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution.

It's Robin Hood in reverse. The rich take from the poor to give to themselves.

How did corporations aggrandize so much power? It's been a long and constant process beginning perhaps before the railroad boom in the 1880s.

We have recently witnessed a huge erosion of rights for "Us People." Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission removed any limits on corporate political campaign contributions. Kelo v. City of New London grants eminent domain "takings" for economic purposes. There are many cases beginning in the 1880s that made an incremental but ever-mounting surge of power for corporations.

Today, it seems corporations have more rights than people. Shouldn't it be the other way around?

The immediate call to action to stop this unwise pipeline and prevent this corporate take over is to inform the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that the Atlantic Coast

Pipeline should not be built. Contact them at 888 First St. N.W., Washington, DC 20426 or at [www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov). More profoundly and much harder to do is call for legal and constitutional reform to give corporations less power and “Us People” more.

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