

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

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AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND
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GENERAL LAWS AND TECHNOLOGY
PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS

May 11, 2016

The Honorable Norman C. Bay and Commissioners
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 1st Street NE
Washington, DC 20426

RE: Docket # CP15-554-000 (Atlantic Coast Pipeline) & Docket #CP16-10-000 (Mountain Valley Pipeline)

Dear Chairman Bay and Commissioners:

As members of the Virginia General Assembly, we are writing to you today to respectfully request that you develop a comprehensive Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, Mountain Valley Pipeline, Appalachian Connector Pipeline, and WB Xpress project proposals. According to White House guidance, a programmatic EIS provides a “more comprehensive picture of the consequences of multiple proposed actions.” Due to the narrow geographic and temporal scope of these projects, we believe a programmatic EIS is necessary to understand the full impacts of this development, should all four of these projects proceed.

The potential for cumulative impacts of these projects is quite large. Below are a few that we feel warrant your particular consideration.

- Increasing the region’s greenhouse gas emissions, including emissions related to transmission, increased drilling, and increased combustion of natural gas
- Changes in the rural character of the central Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountain regions of Virginia and West Virginia. These pipelines and related compressor stations will promote industrialization of the area. Moreover, the pipelines could attract additional interstate and intrastate pipeline expansion, further promoting industrial development.
- Encouraging the development of shale gas drilling throughout the region. The Marcellus Shale formation extends into western Virginia, but the region has experienced no drilling development in recent years. These pipelines represent an extensive investment in natural gas transmission infrastructure in the region, which could lower the cost to develop the resource and encourage its extraction.

- Clearing of forest habitat on public and private lands throughout the region, including habitat occupied by endangered and threatened species such as the Indiana bat, the northern long-eared bat, and the cow knob salamander.
- Adversely affecting the region's air quality.
- Impacts on the regional economy.
- Impacts on the national forest lands in the region, including the loss of forest habitat and the disruption of forest habitat connectivity.
- Harm to water quality and watersheds providing drinking water.
- Impacts to the national parks throughout the region including the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, including fragmentation to intact-forested areas, impacts to interior forest species, and disruption to viewsheds and visitor experience.

In response to a flood of bipartisan calls for FERC to conduct a PEIS, the agency has stated that it “does not direct the development of the gas industry's infrastructure, either on a broad regional basis or in the design of specific projects. Nor does it engage in regional planning exercises that would result in the selection of one project over another.” However, a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement fits squarely within FERC's authority. Only a PEIS will give decision makers and the public the fullest possible scope of information to ensure the best decisions are made for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Congress has given the Commission the critical task of striking the right balance between approving necessary energy development while also safeguarding the environment, the community, and private property. With so much at stake in this region, we believe a Programmatic EIS will help the Commission—and the public—understand the full impact of these pipeline projects.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Ebbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Adam P. Ebbin
Member, Virginia Senate