

FERC wants pipeline questions answered

Kinder Morgan has 20 days to comply

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Federal regulators have given Kinder Morgan 20 days to answer the comments and questions raised by area planners, opposition groups and environmental organizations at public hearings about the energy giant's controversial \$5.2 billion pipeline proposed to pass through Franklin County.

Among the comments to be responded to, as requested by Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Environmental Project Manager Eric J. Tomasi in his letter Tuesday, are those posed to the Massachusetts Energy Facilities Siting Board at public hearings in August in Greenfield, Pittsfield, Lunenburg and Dracut.

FERC demands responses to "general comments" in more than 25 separate letters from various organizations, including the Millers River Watershed Council, the Conway Agricultural Commission, the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, and Northeast Energy Solutions, as well as specific information in Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co.'s "resource reports" filed earlier this year.

Among those areas for which TGP's Nov. 20 application "did not fully provide adequate data," FERC notes, is a detailed analysis of alternatives for each of the project's compressor station, including one planned for Northfield.

"Once we have received your responses to this and future data requests and reviewed them for completeness, we will be able to establish a schedule for completing the (environmental) impact statement," Tomasi writes.

Among the "grave concerns" are those raised by the Millers River Watershed Council and Erving Conservation Commission in a Nov. 19 letter saying that blasting for the project could tip a paper sludge dump in Erving and a demolition materials dump on the Wendell bank into the Millers River. The proposed pipeline would pass within half a mile of a dump composed primarily of sludge from the Erving Paper Co. mill and within 100 feet of the river on the Erving bank. The groups contend that a Wendell construction demolition waste dump already migrating downhill to the river could be destabilized by blasting.

The Conway Agricultural Commission raises concerns in its Nov. 20 letter about health risks from venting of gas and related chemicals at a blowoff valve planned near farms and homes on Shelburne Falls Road, as well as disturbance of aquifers

and potential contamination of groundwater and private wells, “significant changes” to soil substrata, soil erosion, and an invitation to invasive species.

On a grander scale, the same letter says, “To invest in large-scale fossil fuel infrastructure when we are at a tipping point of climate catastrophe, in our opinion, is ludicrous. Climate change is already affecting our local agricultural economy with devastating weather events. Climate change poses the largest threat to the viability of agriculture in Conway and to life on Earth.”

In her Oct. 19 filing, state Attorney General Maura Healey called on FERC to “fully evaluate the need for this project in conjunction with other pipeline proposals for the region,” considering her office’s regional study of capacity needs and options to address regional electricity reliability.

NES, a coalition of land trusts and other environmental organizations including Franklin Land Trust, Trustees of Reservations and the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, submitted comments to FERC in Oct. 20 and Nov. 12 letters raising a host of questions and pointing to inaccuracies in TGP’s March and July resource reports.

Among the most pervasive problems raised by NES attorney Vincent DeVito is outdated and inaccurate data filed about wetlands, vernal pools and other water resources that can be affected by the project.

“They’re giving them 20 days to responded to all of these folks, with the enormity of the information, they really can’t,” DeVito said. “They’ll end up asking for an extension to respond to these.. (At issue) is the lack of specificity, the lack of accuracy and the continued use of bad information for a federal filing.”

DeVito said that FERC, which is understaffed, wants this accurate information provided for it to do its thorough review of the developer’s application.

After failing to get questions answered from March and July reports, he said, “FERC is saying, “This your third bite of the apple; where’s this information? We’re not going to continue until you give us this information.”

On the Web: <http://1.usa.gov/21SBsJ7> <http://1.usa.gov/1IY4nzZ>