

Tennessee Gas files draft environmental impact report

By RICHIE DAVIS

Recorder Staff

Friday, March 13, 2015

The proponents of a natural gas pipeline that would cross Franklin County passed a key milestone Friday by filing its first draft environmental impact report on the roughly \$5 billion project with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co. is proposing that its Northeast Energy Direct project pass through Ashfield, Conway, Shelburne, Deerfield, Montague, Erving, Northfield and a corner of Warwick before traversing southern New Hampshire and re-emerging in Massachusetts just west of its Middlesex County terminus.

The proposed 36-inch-diameter pipeline, for which a second draft environmental report is scheduled in June, followed by a final environmental report in September along with a formal FERC application, could see pre-construction work begin in January 2017, with construction beginning in April 2017.

The Houston-based company, which says its pipeline is needed to augment the supply of natural gas to the region, expects its 430-mile-long, 2.2-billion-cubic-foot-a-day pipeline to begin operation in November 2018.

The draft report, sections of which the company says it will update in the months ahead, presents a variety of alternatives for its project, including other possible routes and providing for the region's energy needs through other power sources, and rejects them all in favor of its proposal.

The proposed route would be aligned with powerline rights of way for 70 percent of its route in Massachusetts, the company says, with a 100-foot construction path along the corridor until eastern Shelburne and Deerfield, rejoining the powerline right of way on Erving's Poplar Mountain and then veering eastward around the Northfield Mountain reservoir and over Brush Mountain, crossing into Warwick just south of the New Hampshire line.

A meter station for the pipeline is delineated in West Deerfield, near the Greenfield town line, on about an acre, and an 80,000-horsepower compressor station is listed on a to-be-determined 10-acre site in a four-mile area of Northfield. Twenty acres would be required for its construction.

In its draft report, TGP addresses an alternative "Access Northeast" pipeline project proposed by Spectra Energy, Northeast Utilities and National Grid to expand an existing Algonquin Gas Transmission pipeline through Connecticut to Boston and northward:

"(The) proposed Atlantic Bridge Project and Access Northeast Project will provide more transportation capacity on the AGT systems, but, based on the limited public information about this project, will not be capable of providing service to Tennessee's Project Shippers in New York, Massachusetts, northern Connecticut and New Hampshire, unless AGT were to build an entirely new pipeline system that will essentially duplicate the Tennessee system.

Such a project will involve the construction of hundreds of miles of new pipeline facilities, presumably resulting in significantly greater environmental impacts than (Tennessee's) proposed NED Project facilities, which includes pipeline looping and co-location with existing facilities to the extent practicable and feasible.”

Months before TGP filed its pre-application proposal with FERC for a project that would have continued eastward across Warwick and Orange, opponents of the project organized against it, contending it was not needed and would cause widespread environmental damage.

In recent months, Deerfield, Northfield, Conway and other towns have taken stances opposing the pipeline, in some cases denying permission to survey on town property.

Kathryn Eiseman, director of the Massachusetts Pipeline Awareness Network, commented after receiving the latest filing.

“We will be reviewing Kinder Morgan’s draft environmental report over the coming weeks and months. There’s plenty to digest and question, and we will be preparing for the official scoping comment period, which FERC has not yet announced. The scoping period will be our opportunity to help shape FERC’s environmental review and ask, in a detailed manner, that it hold (TGP owner) Kinder Morgan’s proposal to the highest scrutiny.”

Although no official comment period has been defined yet by FERC as part of TGP’s pre-filing process, Eiseman speculated that scoping hearings and a related comment period to determine what will be considered in the Final Environment Impact Report may take place around May.

“Now is the time for everyone — landowners and municipalities — to do their homework, so that we will all be ready to inform the official scoping process at the proper time.”

Vincent DeVito, a Boston attorney representing Northeast Energy Solutions on behalf of Franklin Land Trust, The Trustees of Reservations, the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition and other environmental interests, said the organization “intends to pursue an analysis of what is submitted to FERC by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline so that regulators can have a comparative, factual reference in-hand.”