



How FERC Works

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Dominion Resources, Inc. is still looking into the possibility of building the Southeast Reliability Project, a natural gas pipeline that could potentially travel through Pocahontas County, WV and Highland County, VA. Before a decision can be made on proceeding with the project, it would have to be approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), an independent federal agency that looks into the environmental impact of proposals.

According to spokesperson Tamara Young-Allen, FERC is charged by U.S. Congress to regulate the transportation and construction of natural gas facilities. “Any interstate proposal goes through FERC,” she said. “When FERC approves a project, it adopts the safety standards that are developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation.”

Dominion has not yet submitted an application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. If they receive a formal application, the FERC staff will conduct a thorough analysis to compose what Young-Allen calls an environmental document. At this time, they would provide opportunities for communities along the pipeline to be involved in the process.

“We will ask the public about issues that would need to be addressed in the environmental document,” Young-Allen said. “Once we draft that document, our staff will hold meetings with the public to get comments about what needs to be involved in its review of the environmental impact of the proposal. We will also ask for written comments as well.”

According to Young-Allen, public input is key to the Commission’s review of any project. “There is currently a pending proposal where the public suggested an alternative to the pipeline route,” she said, “and our staff is

in the process now of reviewing the potential environmental impact of that suggested route to determine if it's more environmentally acceptable than what the company is proposing to do. So public input is very important to the Commission's mission here."

The FERC staff looks at proposed variations and alternatives to the pipeline proposal during the review process. "We'll make a determination on which proposed route is the most environmentally acceptable, and we'll make that recommendation to the Commission in the preparation of the final environmental document," Young-Allen explained. "Once the final document is prepared, it is placed in the public record and then it's ready for the Commission to make a decision. The Commission is comprised of five presidentially appointed members, and they are charged with reviewing the record to determine if the project should be approved with the recommendations suggested by staff in the environmental document."

Along with public input, Young-Allen explained that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission also collects information from areas like the Monongahela National Forest. "Our staff would analyze the potential environmental impact, work with the other federal agencies who have a jurisdiction over that particular area—maybe the U.S. Forest Service—and could suggest a variation to the route or place a number of conditions to ensure that the route would not be adversely impacted by any construction of the pipeline."

"They could suggest an alternative route," Young-Allen explained. "They could have conditions that include making surveys to see if there are any endangered species to determine if the construction and operation of the pipeline would be done in an environmentally safe manner. That happens in just about every case that comes before the Commission. An application that's submitted to FERC doesn't necessarily come out the same way once the Commission approves it, should the Commission decide to approve it."

To learn more about public involvement with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, visit ferc.gov. "On the blue strip toward the right, there's a section entitled, 'For Citizens,' and it shows how people can become involved in FERC's process," Young-Allen said. "It also shows a number of projects that would be near your area. It also shows a schematic chart that shows the whole FERC process in reviewing natural gas certificate proposals."