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Tennessee Gas Pipeline Blasts Through NJ Highlands & Watershed Lands – Will Import Marcellus Frack Gas

November 2nd, 2010 [Bill Wolfe](#) [Leave a comment](#) [Go to comments](#)

Why is Environmental Review Just Beginning on a Project Already Under Construction?



Tennessee Gas Pipeline under construction, destroying forests in Newark Watershed (Highland Lakes, NJ -view looking east)

[**Update - 11/3/10** - [FERC Federal Register Notice](#) - hearing tonight in Milford, Pa. at Delaware Valley HS]

I just got home from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\) scoping hearing](#) on one of the multiple segments on the controversial Tennessee Gas Co. pipeline project (TGP) (see today's [Star Ledger set up story](#).) (Tennessee is part of the [El Paso – as in Texas – pipeline Group](#)).

The hearing was held up in Ringwood. **About 65 residents turned out to oppose the project, including the NJ Highlands Coalition and Sierra Club.**

[Scoping](#) is required by NEPA regulations. It is supposed to be “**an early and open process for determining the scope of issues** to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action.”

The TGP project would have a series of major negative impacts. It is just one piece of a massive regional gas pipeline infrastructure expansion project. It would transport 1 billion cubic feet per day of Marcellus shale gas, through Pennsylvania into the NY metro region.

[Marcellus shale “fracking” is controversial](#): NY State and the Delaware River Basin Commission have imposed moratoria on well drilling. The US EPA is conducting a national study of the impacts of drilling and legislation is pending in Congress to strictly regulate fracking. (see: (see: **[MARCELLUS GAS PIPELINE’S CHEAP PATH THROUGH JERSEY PARKLANDS — Paltry \\$45,000 for 24-Year Lease on \\$2 Billion Pipeline Up for Quick Approval](#)** and for additional info, also see [this](#) and [this](#))

Given these significant scientific, regulatory, and legislative efforts, it is premature for FERC to consider this pipeline proposal. Reviews should wait until the scientific data are in and a new regulatory framework is established. Resolution of those pending actions will have large impacts on the availability and quantity of gas supply and the environmental safeguards on fracking Marcellus gas.

Additionally, 1 billion cubic feet of new gas supply would have significant energy price and demand impacts, which could undermine cost effective energy conservation and development of alternative renewable energy technologies. FERC must consider broader energy policy and economics, and assure that this project does not harm sound energy infrastructure capacity and overall regional energy policy, particularly global warming, efficiency, and renewable energy policy. NJ’s Energy Master Plan and Global Warming Response Act emission reductions must be considered by FERC.

From a land use perspective, the proposed “Northeast Upgrade” portion of the overall project is 37 miles of 30 inch diameter pipeline that would cut through and destroy at least 638 acres of extremely environmentally sensitive forested and unique public parklands, including the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, the Appalachian Trail, the NJ Highlands, and numerous State Parks, streams, wetlands, water supply watershed lands, critical wildlife habitat, water supply reservoirs, and historic sites. FERC must not allow Tennessee to segment the larger project, and must conduct a full blown EIS and rigorously evaluate cumulative and secondary impacts of the overall project.

To try to get a quick handle on the TGP project, I did a little research on the [FERC review process](#).

Even for someone with experience in environmental regulation, it is very difficult to understand how the various pieces of this puzzle fit together, see the big picture and get a handle on exactly

what the Tennessee Gas pipeline project is. There are a number of [different plans and routes out there](#). The Tennessee project has been segmented, and broken into at least 5 different “loops”, which are difficult to understand as they are described. For example, Here is a recent [NEPA scoping on the related “300 Line” project](#).

The [FERC reviews process](#); the NEPA environmental impact review process; and federal and state environmental permitting are extremely complex and not transparent to the average citizen, making it difficult to participate effectively. Each government agency has its own silo, with no one looking out for the overall public interest. This makes it easy for Tennessee to game the system.

After a little effort, I found out that **some NJ segments of the Tennessee pipeline project in NJ are already under construction**. In their most recent weekly status report, Tennessee Gas reported to FERC:

“Pipeline Construction Loop 325, Sussex and Passaic Counties, New Jersey – Construction of 15.98 miles of a new 30-inch diameter pipeline adjacent to existing right-of-way. **Clearing operations began at the right-of-way off of Highland Lake Road; (Highland Lakes). The clearing crew worked east of the horizontal directional drill entry from MP 6.57 to MP 7.25. Sensitive species exclusion fencing was installed as needed prior to Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company **300 Line Project (“Project”)**, Docket No. CP09-444-000 Weekly [Status Report Week of October 17, 2010 through October 23, 2010](#)”**

This most recent Tennessee progress Report to FERC on the **” Pipeline Construction Loop 325”** appears to overlap or conflict with the **FERC Environmental Assessment summary document distributed at the hearing tonight**. That FERC document describes the proposed “Northeast Upgrade Project” as including:

Loop 325 – Installation of 7.7 miles of 30-inch diameter pipeline loop in Passaic and Bergen Counties” (@page 3)

Before tonight’s hearing, I decided to take a ride up and observe the forest destruction in the Sussex and Passaic stretch described in the FERC Status Report. Here’s what I saw:







El Paso goons ran me off the site - the first words out of their mouths were: "no photos allowed". No big deal, I bushwacked to ridges.



This is the existing pipeline right of way - the forest seems to be healing.