

Letter to Your Virginia Representative, with a Focus on Landowner Rights

Dear Virginia Representative,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed EQT/NextEra Mountain Valley Pipeline Project and to urge you to oppose this project and to advocate for the rights of Virginia landowners and communities who find themselves in the path of such projects.

The Mountain Valley Pipeline Project is a proposed natural gas pipeline that would carry hydraulically fracked natural gas from the Marcellus shale region, specifically from Wetzel County, West Virginia, to its expected primary delivery point, Transcontinental Gas Pipeline Company's (Transco) Zone 5 compressor station 165 in Pittsylvania County. In addition to the primary delivery point, EQT has stated that they would offer natural gas shippers the option to request a project extension to delivery points further south into North Carolina. The route would cross both private and public lands. It will disrupt transportation including having to cross I-81, Norfolk Southern rails, and many other surface and neighborhood roads and streets. It will pass through the Appalachian Mountains, across the Appalachian Trail, the Blue Ridge Parkway and countless streams and tributaries.

The proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline will be 42" in diameter – a size never constructed in mountainous terrain as we have in the New River Valley. The proposed pipeline will be 12" inches larger in diameter than the 30" pipelines causing catastrophic damage in Appomattox in 2008 and San Bruno, CA in 2010. It will carry almost 2 times the volume of explosive methane gas as each of those pipelines. It will have a capacity of 2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day which means that it will be capable of pushing 23,148 cubic feet of natural gas per second under or near homes, schools, and hospitals. Since each cubic foot of natural gas represents more than 1,000 BTUs, then that means 23.148 Million BTUs per second will be flowing under or near our homes. This will be a high pressure 1,440 PSI pipeline. If the pipe should burst an unprecedented volume of gas will leave the breach in the pipeline at an extraordinary pressure. Catastrophic damage will be an understatement. The New River Valley does not have the emergency services or forestry services to contain a catastrophic event in mountainous regions with prevailing strong winds along ridges.

The proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline will be devastating to those of us who are landowners in the New River Valley. We will have reduced use of our land, lower land values, and reduced ability to sell, subdivide, or develop our land. All of this results in a reduction to the tax base for counties affected by this proposed pipeline.

Due to the restrictions of the pipeline right-of-way, we will essentially have no access or ability to use our property – property for which we will be expected to continue to pay taxes. For instance, on the 75' pipeline right-of-way we would be restricted from constructing buildings; we could not construct any playground "forts" or "tree houses" if that construction required holes for the supporting posts; we could never plant trees on the right of way; we could have no roads across the right of way and for those of us in agriculture that would be a problem because we could not use any heavy equipment or trucks over the pipeline unless we paid for special access points; we could have no patios, garages, or above ground pools; and the restrictions go on and on. Technically we will still own our land, pay taxes on it, but we won't be able to do much with it. The pipeline would thus decrease property values, limit the use of personal property within the pipeline easement, and compromise the livelihoods of the many ranchers in the New River Valley, and significantly reduce the income of residents who rely on farming and tourism for their income.

During construction our pets, children, and livestock would be in grave danger. The 125'- 200' construction right of way will require a clear cut so orchards, ornamental trees, and in some cases virgin timber would all go the way of the logging crews. Chain saws, trees being felled, logs stacked – and all of that in our backyard where our children and dogs have played. The right-of-way would be graded using bulldozers and other heavy equipment. Heavy equipment, such as backhoes, much larger trenching machines, and commercial excavating equipment would be used to dig the pipeline trench, which could be as deep as 6.5' – 11' depending on ground conditions. Our children and pets will be at danger due to the equipment and the trench which will left open for some period of time. In areas where bedrock is near the surface, blasting will be required. Our topography is rich in limestone and shale which will most likely require blasting very near homes potentially damaging our homes and putting all our lives in danger.

Once completed, the pipeline easement would be maintained by chemical herbicides which are often applied by aerial spraying which can cause many health problems in children and adults including Parkinson's disease later in life. The spraying of herbicides can also be harmful to livestock and crops.

As landowners we will have diminished or negated property rights in the face of large infrastructure projects such as the EQT Mountain Valley pipeline: Natural gas companies can survey private property without the consent of the property owner, and once receiving FERC certification, eminent domain will allow for an easement to be granted without a landowner's cooperation or permission. The [Montgomery County] Board of Supervisors and other local officials should have the right to make decisions about land use activities within their jurisdiction; and rural communities should have the right to refuse industrial development that threatens their local economy.

We request that you repeal Section 56-49.01 of the Virginia State Code. This law essentially gives natural gas companies unlimited access to our property. If the company follows the guidelines established in the code which simply consists of sending the landowner a certified letter specifying the date the company wishes to enter an individual's property and does so no less than 15 days prior to the date set forth in the letter, the landowner has no choice but to comply. If the landowner does not provide written permission, this section of the code automatically permits the natural gas company access. As representatives of the taxpayers and citizens of Virginia, you should be representing the property rights of individuals and not the deep pockets of special interest groups.

If constructed, the Mountain Valley Pipeline would have a lasting negative impact on the New River Valley counties of Giles and Montgomery as well as the other counties in its path, Roanoke, Franklin, and Pittsylvania Counties. Construction of the pipeline involves cutting a 125 to 200 clear-cut right-of-way through forestland, farms, and the backyards of citizens of Virginia. Our beautiful New River Valley, the Appalachian Trail, and the Blue Ridge Parkway and the lives of those of us who live here will be forever scared.

As your constituent, I urge you to oppose the construction of the EQT/NextEra Mountain Valley Pipeline Project, repeal Section 56-49.01 of the Virginia State Code and to defend the rights of landowners and communities who find themselves in the path of this proposed pipeline.

Sincerely,

Your Name