
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION



WASHINGTON, D.C. 20426

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 18, 2002
Docket Nos. PF01-1-000 and
PF02-1-000; CP00-422-000

USE OF COMMISSION'S NEPA PRE-FILING PROCESS FOR GAS PIPELINE PROJECTS IS INCREASING

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) staff has completed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the first project to begin making use of the new National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) pre-filing review process, and it now has two additional natural gas pipeline proposals that are actively taking advantage of the process. These two are: Dominion Transmission, Inc.'s Greenbrier Pipeline Project in Docket No. PF01-1-000, and most recently, Blue Atlantic Transmission System's project in Docket No. PF02-1-000. The Greenbrier Pipeline Project consists of about 280 miles of pipeline that would originate in Kanawha County, West Virginia and end in Granville County, North Carolina. The Blue Atlantic Transmission System Project consists of over 800 miles of pipeline that would extend from Sable Island, offshore Nova Scotia, Canada, to markets in the northeastern United States.

The NEPA pre-filing environmental review process offers a number of potentially significant benefits to companies choosing to implement it.

- ! It establishes a framework for constructive discussion among natural gas transmission project proponents, potentially affected landowners, Federal, state, and local agencies, and the Commission's staff before a final pipeline route is selected by the proponent.
- ! It allows the applicant and interested stakeholders to identify issues, and attempt to resolve those issues, during the initial stages of developing a project and its route at the "grassroots" level of the project.

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- ! It commences the scoping of issues earlier and while plans are more flexible.
- ! It allows Commission staff to:
 - ▶ develop initial information about the project;
 - ▶ identify affected parties and establish contacts;
 - ▶ conduct site visits of the preliminary route and develop practical alternatives that avoid areas of concern;
 - ▶ attend the applicant's public information meetings;
 - ▶ work with land managing agencies to identify and avoid issues related to overlapping jurisdiction;
 - ▶ develop mitigation measures for the project;
 - ▶ select a third-party contractor to assist staff's EIS preparation;
 - ▶ review and comment on draft resource reports;
 - ▶ conduct the Commission's scoping meetings for the project and begin preparing a preliminary draft EIS; and
 - ▶ pursue other creative opportunities to involve stakeholders in the project design.

These activities, when started early, enhance the NEPA process by facilitating issue identification, study needs, and issue resolution. For companies that provide a detailed route and the related resource reports substantially before filing the Section 7 application, a draft EIS may be released within 2 to 3 months after a complete application is filed. This could result in an FEIS being issued 6 to 7 months after the application is filed. Therefore, a final certificate could be issued 7 to 9 months earlier than possible for the traditional certificate application process.

The Kern River 2003 Expansion Project (Docket No. CP01-422-000) was the first project to use the NEPA pre-filing review process. It comprises approximately 718 miles of pipeline beginning in Lincoln County, Wyoming and extending into Kern County, California. The NEPA pre-filing review enabled the staff to begin agency scoping meetings and the review of draft environmental resource reports before Kern River filed its certificate application in August, 2001. A benefit of the staff's early involvement was that the draft EIS was issued in February, 2002, and the FEIS in June, 2002. This FEIS date is about six months earlier than average for a major project. On July 17, the Commission approved an order issuing a certificate.

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The Commission is improving the way the public is informed as a project develops. The goal is to have applicants file better applications that can be processed more efficiently by having significant environmental issues resolved in advance. Commission staff will also have a more complete understanding of the remaining issues earlier in the review process. A guidance document on how to initiate the NEPA Pre-Filing Involvement For Natural Gas Projects is posted on the Commission's website (www.ferc.gov).

The pre-filing environmental process furthers both the intent of NEPA and the Commission's Strategic Plan. It allows the Commission's environmental staff to work with the applicant and all stakeholders to resolve resource issues in a more timely manner. This, in turn, allows the Commission to be more responsive to the energy needs of the Nation.

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