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Christopulos: Mountain Valley Pipeline: dangerous, unnecessary, and unwanted .

By Diana Christopulos

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Promoters say the Mountain Valley Pipeline would be a safe, environmentally friendly economic asset developed after thoughtful dialogue.

If only this were true.

The huge, 42-inch pipeline — more than twice the size of existing transmission pipelines — would carry explosive natural gas under enormous pressure. Pipeline failure would incinerate everything for 1,000 feet wide on each side. Yet the company wants to build within 65 feet of an occupied home in the Giles County, using the federal power of eminent domain to cross private land held by families for generations.

If safety is a priority, why did the company choose a path composed of steep, landslide-prone slopes along with caves and underground waterways, all potential causes of catastrophe? Existing transmission pipelines supply our region with natural gas on gentler routes that follow roadways, railways and utility lines.

If safety is a priority, why would they cross the Appalachian Trail on Peters Mountain, where their own consultants identified numerous High Hazard areas? Why would they build near the epicenter of an active seismic zone that experienced an earthquake as recently as May 2017?

Perhaps it should not be surprising that pipelines built since 2010 have dismal safety records, worse than at any time since before World War II.

Natural resources also receive short shrift. The pipeline's own consultant says the project would send hundreds of tons of new sediment down the Roanoke River "until [it] is arrested behind the first dam (i.e., Niagara Dam) or is deposited into Smith Mountain Lake." This would mean higher stormwater fees for cities and counties along the Roanoke River, paid for by local landowners, not by the pipeline company.

Discussions have rarely included the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club (RATC) or the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), despite direction from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to do so. In fact, the company has not contacted RATC in over a year.

The pipeline's dramatic scar would be visible off and on for more than 75 miles on the Appalachian Trail. An ATC simulation shows that the route would be highly visible from Kelly Knob; the pipeline company produced simulations in the fog and claimed no impact.

All of this destruction would create just 34 permanent jobs in Virginia at a cost of millions of dollars per year in lost property values, tax and tourism revenues, and damage to clean air and clean water.

Pipeline opponents include the conservative, mostly Republican county boards of supervisors in Giles, Craig, Montgomery and Roanoke counties. The staid Blue Ridge Land Conservancy and Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation also oppose it, as do dozens of landowner groups and all environmental organizations.

So who wants the pipeline? Mostly its owners, whose "customers" are actually its own subsidiaries.

The lead company is EQT of Pittsburgh, a fracking company that lost almost \$500 million dollars in 2016. Its long-term credit rating is Baa3, one step above junk bonds. The pipeline would essentially be a federal bailout

for EQT, its owners allowed profits of up to 14 percent. When asked by a member of the Roanoke County board of supervisors whether the gas would be exported, the company's representative replied, "Gas molecules flow all over the place."

Another partner, WGL Midstream, has contracts to export natural gas to India.

Consolidated Edison is a New York utility whose own state has banned fracking and denied water permits to two FERC-approved gas pipelines due to concerns about public drinking water and the environment. Virginia would become a pipeline colony for New York — our water and environment sacrificed.

Roanoke Gas, added as a 0.5 percent customer after the project's start, has repeatedly told FERC that this pipeline could be "a third source of natural gas" for the region, hardly a necessity. Studies by both the US Department of Energy and Synapse Energy Economics have shown that Virginia and the Carolinas do not need new natural gas transmission lines. If Roanoke Gas builds a tap in Roanoke, many observers believe that the pipeline would restore its original proposal to build a loud, highly polluting compressor station near the Roanoke River, named after Lynn Swann, a former Pittsburgh Steeler, and reflecting the pipeline's origins.

Mountain Valley Pipeline: dangerous, unnecessary, unwanted.