

ORIGINAL



August 11, 2016

Kimberley Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20426

Re: Docket CP15-558-000 – Proposed PennEast Pipeline Project

Dear Ms. Bose:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Sourland Conservancy, an intervenor in this proceeding. The Sourland Conservancy's mission is to protect, promote and preserve the unique character of the Sourland Mountain region, through which the proposed PennEast Pipeline will cut a devastating path. The Conservancy is located in Hopewell, NJ in Mercer County. The Sourland Mountain region lies, within Somerset, Hunterdon and Mercer Counties.

The Sourland Conservancy endorses the comments by Jim Amon and Joanna Fiori filed to FERC, as follows:

Jim Amon, Feb. 25, 2015:

Both proposed routes for the Penn East pipeline would traverse significant sections of forest in central New Jersey. Roads, power lines, pipelines and the construction of buildings have already severely segmented these forests and we would lose something irreplaceably precious by the severe segmentation that this cut would create. This segmentation is extremely detrimental to the health of the forests. It reduces biodiversity by reducing habitat for flora and fauna that need forest interior to thrive. It opens the canopy so that excessive light reaches the forest floor, which in turn gives opportunity for alien invasive plant species to become established. These alien invasive plants are such successful colonizers of disturbed soil that they greatly reduce the opportunity for native plants to grow. These alien invasive plants reduce biodiversity in the forest, thereby deteriorating the health of the forest. Further, they reduce the biodiversity of the fauna of the central New Jersey forest because our fauna evolved with the native flora and with few exceptions, the alien invasive plants do not fill the dietary needs of the native birds, reptiles and mammals. What is proposed here would result in a vast corridor of alien invasive plants; mile after mile of multiflora rose, Japanese honeysuckle, Oriental bittersweet and just a few other plants, replacing the great complexity of the existing forest.

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The problems created by cutting a pipeline through a forest are not limited to the cut corridor. Once the corridor is cut, increased light would not only reach the cut corridor but would stream into the forest on either side of the cut, wreaking damage for the length of the entire corridor. The environmental impact statement for this project, therefore, must address the damage done to the central New Jersey forest for a considerably greater width than the proposed cut. Diverse factors (such as the character of the forest, the slope and orientation of the corridor) change the width of the impact zone but it is generally agreed upon that a minimum of one hundred and fifty feet on either side of the cut will be detrimentally impacted by such a cut. The impact area identified in the EIS should, therefore be at least three hundred feet wider than the proposed cut.

Intact forests with significant forest interior are rare in central New Jersey and this proposal will significantly reduce the precious forest interior that remains. The residents of central New Jersey should not be forced to lose this precious resource so that the consortium of gas companies that want this line can increase their wealth.

Joanna Fiori, Oct. 28, 2015:

In your analysis of the application from PennEast to build a pipeline that goes through the Sourlands in New Jersey, please consider the area's fragile and unique ecosystem. This 90 square mile area provides the greatest block of contiguous forest habitat in the State's Piedmont province. The Sourland Mountain region is one of only three major areas of unbroken habitat in NJ, at a strategic location mid-way between the Highlands and the Pinelands. The Sourland Mountain region is a critical stopover point for birds migrating along the Atlantic flyway and is one of New Jersey's top fall migration stopover sites.

The region supports a great diversity of bird species, many of which are listed as either threatened or endangered, or are being tracked as species of special concern.

Vernal pools, isolated wetland depressions seasonally filled with water, are common in the Sourlands. Some of these are known breeding sites for a number of herptiles who require these pools for egg laying and early life stages.

The Sourland Mountain region may be the last refuge of some complex plant communities that once flourished in central NJ. Sixteen plant species that are either endangered or of special concern in NJ have been documented in the Sourlands to date.

The Sourland Mountain region is unparalleled as an ecological island of unbroken habitat in central New Jersey, in part due to geological and hydrological features that hinder human encroachment and aided animals and plants.

Headwaters originating on the mountain provide riparian and aquatic habitat, and perched water table areas supply an ephemeral yet critical habitat for a number of specialized organisms. These habitat types, shaped by the geology and contours of the land, its soils and hydrology, are uniquely suited to sustain a diverse array of plants and animals. Nonetheless, manmade activities can easily impact many of these species and the biodiversity of the area.

The proposed PennEast pipeline will disturb this environmental treasure and cause lasting damage that the area cannot afford. Please use your authority to deny this application.

Finally, It is clear from the DEIS that thousands of pages of comments already submitted are being ignored. I am expecting a written response to my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Katmann". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Katmann
Executive Director
Sourland Conservancy

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