

# PREVENTING PIPELINE HARMS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poorly planned and constructed fracked-gas pipeline projects threaten Virginia's fragile water resources and ecosystems. As the construction of pipeline projects harms water quality, the operation of these facilities is associated with the emission of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, as well as carbon dioxide emissions driven by end use, posing serious consequences to the climate. Ultimately, Virginia communities bear the brunt of negative public health impacts to water and air quality, along with economic harm to farmland and other critical agricultural lands. Additionally, the overbuilding of gas infrastructure delays our transition to renewable energy sources and prevents the Commonwealth from achieving equitable clean energy goals. Virginia must strengthen protections for the water resources and communities jeopardized by fossil fuel infrastructure.

## CHALLENGE

Continued expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure is at odds with a healthy future for the Commonwealth, and it runs counter to climate mitigation measures recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).<sup>1</sup> Although Virginia has passed laws to promote clean energy and improve accountability measures, new fossil-fuel infrastructure projects continue to be licensed and ultimately harm Virginia communities. Water and air pollution from fossil fuel infrastructure impedes the historic goals set in federal and state laws, and the resulting harms tend to fall disproportionately on Black, Indigenous, low income, and elderly communities.<sup>2</sup>

Representative of the overbuilding and inappropriate siting of pipeline projects, the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) will increase damage to waterways and private water sources in Southwest Virginia with any further construction. In addition to the 300+ violations for which the company has been cited,<sup>3</sup> MVP has the potential to emit greenhouse gasses on a scale comparable to 18 coal-fired power plants.<sup>4</sup> Construction of the project has wrought significant harm on local environments, damaged Indigenous cultural and sacred sites,<sup>5</sup> and negatively impacted rural communities and residents' livelihoods. The MVP currently lacks

necessary federal permits and authorizations to proceed, but if completed and if placed into operation, the pipeline could be responsible for nearly 1% of all U.S. energy sector greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>6</sup>

New expansion projects proposed for Eastern Virginia, like the 'Virginia Reliability Project,' raise concerns about construction through areas overburdened with existing infrastructure and pollution.<sup>7</sup> Effects on wetlands, especially in areas prone to recurrent flooding, and private wells and springs are also of great concern.

## SOLUTION

Fossil fuels are the energy of Virginia's past, not our future. Given the steps necessary to mitigate the worsening climate crisis, the critical point we have reached in that crisis, and potential for a robust clean energy future for the Commonwealth, new fossil fuel infrastructure should not be pursued. We have learned from projects like the Mountain Valley Pipeline that current laws and regulations do not adequately protect water resources, public health or the environment from the construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure.

Absent a ban, any new fossil fuel build out, including both interstate and intrastate pipelines, must be thoroughly and holistically scrutinized through processes that fully engage and respect the public's views and interests. Fossil fuel projects should receive a comprehensive review, including cumulative health and environmental impacts on nearby communities. For projects already in process, enforcement of pollution laws must be prioritized, and polluters must be held fully accountable, regardless of project completion or abandonment. Review processes should include bonding requirements for appropriate funding or insurance coverage, and include stringent environmental restoration requirements.

Virginia lawmakers should strengthen state review of projects and increase public involvement and participation in those reviews. Ultimately, legislative improvements that accurately recognize the current climate crisis, prevent future harm, protect and restore communities and areas negatively impacted by existing projects, are required.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Include bonding and restoration requirements in permit applications for fossil fuel projects.

Require an individual Virginia Water Protection Permit and Uplands Certification under Article 2.6 of the State Water Control Law for all natural gas transmission pipelines 24 inches inside diameter and greater that are subject to § 7c of the Natural Gas Act.

Prohibit new fossil fuel construction in areas of karst terrain.