Two proposed interstate shale gas pipelines, known as ET Rover and NEXUS, could soon cut through Ohio and into parts of Michigan if approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the lead government agency involved in approving or rejecting pipelines that cross state borders.¹ Both are proposed to travel a similar route and to connect to an existing Vector pipeline in Michigan, which carries natural gas from outside of Chicago across the state to greater Detroit and on to the same hub in Ontario, Canada.² These pipelines threaten property rights of landowners, pose public health and safety issues with any rupture, explosion, or leakage, and proliferate fracking by expanding markets for shale gas.

The Pipelines

Contentious since Energy Transfer first proposed it, the ET Rover pipeline has been re-routed twice due to mass opposition.³ The proposed 711-mile-long ET Rover would have a “total capacity” to send up to 3.25 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) of Utica and Marcellus Shale gas from Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia, through Michigan to Canada.⁴ The current plan has it running 570 miles across Ohio, where it will cut through 18 counties,⁵ and running 100 miles north through three southern Michigan counties — Lenawee, Washtenaw and Livingston. In Livingston County, the ET Rover would connect to Enbridge’s Vector pipeline, which carries gas between Chicago and Detroit, including to the Canadian border for export.⁶

Concurrently the proposed 247-mile NEXUS pipeline would allow Spectra Energy, and its partner on the project, DTE Energy, to transmit up to 1.5 bcf/d of Utica and Marcellus Shale gas, ultimately to the same Enbridge pipeline. NEXUS would cut 200 miles across 11 Ohio counties before passing through Michigan’s Lenawee, Washtenaw and Monroe counties.⁷ NEXUS is not as far along in the FERC process as ET Rover (see below), and its route could still be changed.⁸

The Hazards

Once a pipeline is built, the unlucky landowners along its path or beside a compressor station have no choice but to accept living with the constant risk of accidents, leaks and explosions. Several recent pipeline failures have led to massive destruction and even loss of life.⁹ Making matters worse, heavy construction equipment used to build pipelines compacts the soil, and this can affect the ability of trees or crops to grow for years.¹⁰ Even after construction is completed, risks remain. In the United States, more than 11,000 pipeline incidents have occurred from 1994 to 2014. The incidents have caused $6.5 billion in property damage.¹¹

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¹ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
² Columbiana, Stark, Summit, Wayne, Medina, Lorain, Erie, Sandusky, Wood, Lucas and Fulton counties
³ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
⁴ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
⁵ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
⁶ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
⁷ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
⁸ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
⁹ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
¹⁰ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
¹¹ Noble, Monroe, Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Stark, Wayne, Ashland, Richland, Crawford, Seneca, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Fulton and Defiance counties
According to a Lenawee County resident who is worried about both the ET Rover and NEXUS pipelines, “A number of farmers I know are concerned about tiling, irrigation and drainage. There is a limited amount of economic benefit to the county.” Three of the four counties in the paths of the ET Rover or NEXUS — namely Washtenaw, Lenawee and Monroe — are in a five-county region that accounts for over 10 percent of Michigan’s farms. Moreover, the southeastern region of the state, which includes these three counties, has some of the highest agricultural land values, averaging $4,489 per acre of tiled field cropland.

There is also growing concern about agricultural impacts in Ohio. The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association has come out against both pipelines, and the Ohio Farmers Union has passed a resolution in opposition to the NEXUS pipeline. While ET Rover, due to its sheer magnitude, has been described as an “unprecedented” pipeline project in Ohio, the NEXUS pipeline project is gaining more attention because its route would run close by “more densely” populated counties.

**FERC Status**

**ET Rover:** In November 2014 FERC announced its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Energy Transfer’s Rover pipeline, prompting a scoping period to garner public comments to help FERC determine what issues should be evaluated in the EIS. (An EIS is a document required by federal law for certain actions deemed as “significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.”) Although that scoping period ended on December 18, 2014, FERC continues to accept comments throughout the process.

Upon release of the Draft EIS, which is issued before a Final EIS, there will be, at minimum, a 45-day window for public comment on it. There is no opportunity for public comment after the Final EIS is finalized. In February 2015 Energy Transfer submitted its application to FERC requesting its certificate of public convenience and necessity. If FERC grants this certificate, the company will be given the right to exercise eminent domain for its pipeline. If everything goes as planned, ET Rover pipeline will be in full service by June 2017.

**NEXUS:** In April 2015 FERC announced that it will prepare an EIS for the NEXUS pipeline, prompting its scoping period to acquire initial input from the public for the Draft EIS. The scoping period concluded May 22, 2015, but as with ET Rover, there will be more for the public to comment on when the Draft EIS is published. If everything is approved according to Spectra Energy’s and DTE Energy’s plans, they will begin construction on NEXUS in the first three months of 2017 and have the pipeline in use by November that year.

**Conclusion**

Approving the ET Rover and NEXUS pipelines and allowing eminent domain would benefit only the companies, not the 791,000 people living in the Michigan counties along the proposed paths and the nearly 3 million people living in the potentially affected Ohio counties.

It is imperative that FERC make decisions on behalf of the public’s interest and not that of pipeline corporations with vested interests. Instead of proliferating the extraction, transfer and export of shale gas, it is time for federal agencies to prioritize investing in clean energy solutions. Allowing the build-out of sprawling pipeline infrastructure would lock in decades more of U.S. dependence on dirty fossil fuels. The United States should be weaning off fossil fuel consumption through policies that will lead us to a sustainable, clean energy future. Allowing these pipelines locks in more fracking and more climate pollution and needlessly cuts a swath across Ohio and southern Michigan. FERC should reject the ET Rover and NEXUS pipeline proposals and spare the region of the ill effects.

**Take Action!** In order to stop the NEXUS and ET Rover pipelines, we are going to have to organize our local communities and pressure our local officials to take action to oppose new pipeline projects. For more information on how you can take action and work with other concerned citizens in your community, please contact either our Michigan or Ohio office:

- Michigan: (313) 486-1356 or lkaucheck@fwwatch.org
- Ohio: (513) 394-6257 or aauciello@fwwatch.org

Take action against the NEXUS pipeline here: bit.ly/NOtoNEXUS.

Take action against the ET Rover pipeline here: bit.ly/NOtoETRover.
Endnotes


3 Hasemyer, 2015.


5 Rover Pipeline, (Fact Sheet.) “Ohio Fact Sheet.” March 2015 at 2.

6 Energy Transfer, 2015; Hasemyer, 2015; Vector Pipeline, 2014 at 1 and 7.

7 NEXUS Gas Transmission. “Public and Agency Participation Plan.” January 2015 at 1; NEXUS Gas Transmission. “NEXUS Gas Transmission Project. Resource Report 1, General Project Description.” January 2015 at Table 1.6-1, Table 1.9-1 and Figure 1.


18 “Pipeline opponents seek strength in numbers.” Associated Press. February 1, 2015.


20 42 U.S. Code §4332.


22 Parfomak, 2015 at 5; 40 C.F.R. §1506.10(c).


24 GAO, 2013 at 22.

25 Energy Transfer, 2015.


27 Ibid.


For more information:
web: foodandwaterwatch.org
e-mail: info@fwwatch.org
phone: (202) 683-2500 (DC) • (510) 922-0720 (CA)
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