

**Catskill Mountainkeeper
Natural Resources Defense Council
Riverkeeper
Scenic Hudson
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter**

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Enviro Groups Ask Thruway Authority, DEC to Suspend Review of “Unviable” Pilgrim Pipelines

HUDSON VALLEY, N.Y.—Leading environmental groups opposing the proposal to build two 168-mile oil pipelines through the heart of the Hudson Valley sent a letter to the New York State Thruway Authority and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) on Friday, March 25, urging the agencies to suspend further review of the project to prevent waste of agency time and resources. The groups’ recommendation is based on a century-old New York state law that gives cities and villages in the path of a proposed oil pipeline a yes or no vote on whether it passes through their communities. Given the level of local government opposition to the pipelines expressed over the past year, the project appears to be unviable. The letter—from Catskill Mountainkeeper, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Riverkeeper, Scenic Hudson and Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter—highlights:

Pipelines would cut through heart of the Hudson Valley

Pilgrim Transportation of New York, Inc. (Pilgrim) proposes to build and operate two petroleum pipelines running between Albany, N.Y., and Linden, N.J., carrying volatile Bakken crude oil south and refined petroleum products north, with a portion of the route lying alongside the New York State Thruway (Thruway). The rest of the line would be buried in private or municipally owned lands. In New York, the pipelines would cut through 31 towns, villages and cities in Albany, Rensselaer, Greene, Ulster, Orange and Rockland counties.

Big impacts with no benefits

Construction and operation of the pipelines—which would be the first oil pipelines of this scale to cross the Hudson Valley—would result in significant environmental impacts and health and safety risks to the communities through which it passes, with no discernable benefits to those communities. The proposal includes not only a 168-mile-long mainline, but 14 miles of lateral pipelines, four pump stations, 10 meter stations, seven temporary contractor/pipe yards, and numerous temporary and permanent access roads. The pipelines would require two crossings of the Hudson River, and would cross every major tributary to the Hudson between Albany and the New York-New Jersey border. It also would run across or adjacent to invaluable public parks and lands, including Sterling Forest and Harriman State Park.

Municipalities overwhelmingly reject project and use of eminent domain

In November 2015, Pilgrim applied for permission to locate a large portion of its proposed mainline within the Thruway right of way—and the DEC and Thruway Authority now are gearing up to perform an environmental review of the project. Roughly 40 miles of the proposed mainline and laterals in New York are located outside the right-of-way, passing through or near residences, businesses, public parks and farms. Pilgrim is seeking to use eminent domain if landowners won’t agree to construction of the lines, as well as access roads and other project infrastructure, on their property. Whether in or outside the Thruway right-of-way, concerns about an accident are high, especially given that Bakken crude oil is highly volatile and federal data show that pipelines actually spill more oil per ton-mile transported than rail or barge and can release far greater quantities of oil in a single incident. A spill or explosion would present significant risks to public health, including contamination of drinking water resources for millions of people. Based on these significant risks to public health and safety, 22 New York municipalities, a majority of which lie in the path of the pipelines, have already passed resolutions opposing the project.

“The Pilgrim Pipelines pose an enormous threat to the invaluable natural resources of the Hudson Valley and to public health and safety,” said **Hayley Carlock, director of Environmental Advocacy at Scenic Hudson**. “Given the resources at stake, the infeasibility of the project and the lack of adequate information to conduct an environmental review, the state should conserve time and resources and halt review of the pipelines. Our local communities have overwhelmingly stated loud and clear that they don’t want these pipelines, and the state should listen.”

(more)

“Pilgrim is trying to quietly get approval for these dangerous pipelines so they can start pumping crude oil through Hudson Valley communities before residents notice,” said **Dan Raichel, staff attorney at NRDC**. “Local governments overwhelmingly oppose the pipeline and their voices must be heard. The state should stop moving forward with a project that threatens the health, safety and clean drinking water for millions of New Yorkers.”

Municipalities hold the cards

As highlighted in the letter, under New York law, local governments have a big say over oil pipelines. Unlike gas pipelines, petroleum pipelines are regulated by state law that requires that “pipeline corporations” obtain the permission of cities and villages by a two-thirds vote to build a pipeline within local borders. Additional approvals are required for crossing public lands and highways and building through certain types of private land.

Kate Hudson, Riverkeeper’s director for Cross-Watershed Initiatives, highlighted the importance of this law. “Local governments in the path of Pilgrim’s oil pipelines have been saying ‘No’ to this destructive proposal for over a year. But towns rejecting ill-conceived fossil fuel projects that will harm their communities has never in the past been enough to stop them. Thankfully, because of a 100-year-old New York law, villages and cities in the path of Pilgrim’s oil pipelines do have the right and the authority to say no, and no one can overrule them. Riverkeeper calls on state officials and our governor to listen to and honor the voices that matter, the local governments that have already courageously taken a stand against Pilgrim, and affirm New York’s commitment to its clean energy goals.”

“The insurmountable environmental obstacles facing the Pilgrim Pipeline should alone make this dangerous project dead on arrival,” said **Roger Downs, conservation director of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter**. “But with the opposition of virtually every municipality in the pipelines’ pathway, the state should find an expedient way to deny Thruway access to this proposal before a single cent of taxpayer money is wasted on a pointless review.”

“Pilgrim asking New Yorkers to evaluate a proposed route we expect to change is waste of taxpayer dollars. The proposal for the Pilgrim pipelines is facing enormous opposition all along the proposed route. This is because it is a bad idea at the wrong time. Communities do not want the threat of oil spills, and given the global climate crisis we need to be investing in alternative sources of energy, not granting eminent domain to oil companies to take private property for corporate profit,” said **Wes Gillingham, program director of Catskill Mountainkeeper**.

“Numerous municipalities have made clear by formal resolution that they see no benefit to this project and find it completely out of step with local and state energy goals,” said **Rosendale Town Councilwoman Jen Metzger**, who introduced the first resolution of opposition to the project in the state. “It is my belief that the local approvals needed for these pipelines are way out of reach.”

Project is infeasible and agencies lack adequate information to review

Given fierce municipal opposition in both New York and New Jersey, the environmental groups note that the project is unlikely to be built as planned, and urge the agencies to save valuable resources by suspending review of the project. Further, despite the fact that the Pipelines require dozens of federal, state and local approvals (on both sides of the border), Pilgrim to date has only submitted one isolated permit application. Under these circumstances, as the groups’ letter highlights, Pilgrim has simply not submitted enough information to enable DEC or the Thruway Authority to perform an adequate review of the project, also hindering municipal and public participation in the review process.

In light of these deficiencies in Pilgrim’s application, the environmental organizations make the case that moving forward with review of the speculative and incomplete proposal would be a waste of time and resources by the Thruway Authority and DEC, as well as the public. The groups urge the Thruway Authority and DEC to either direct that Pilgrim withdraw the application or suspend review until Pilgrim demonstrates the project’s feasibility and submits all other necessary permit applications and supporting information.