

# CURRENTS

## Public Speaks Out Regarding Pipeline Across Pinelands

### *Line Would Upgrade Coal Plant to Gas*

About 200 people attended a public hearing in Galloway Township Monday night to voice their opinions on the draft proposal by the Pinelands Commission to allow South Jersey Gas to build a liquefied natural gas pipeline along roadsides through the Pinelands from its port in Maurice River Township, Cumberland County, to the existing Beesley's Point coal-fired electric generation plant in Upper Township, Cape May County.

The state Board of Public Utilities has approved the project, saying it is necessary to meet the state's energy needs.

South Jersey Gas is proposing to install approximately 14.85 miles of a 24-inch natural gas main within the Pinelands Area and approximately 5.11 miles of line located outside of the Pinelands Area. The gas pipeline would be installed at varying depths below ground.

The proposed gas main is intended to supply the Beesley's Point electric generation plant owned by B.L. England to comply with part of a N.J. Department of Environmental Protection administrative consent order. The order requires B.L. England to discontinue using coal as the primary fuel source for the production of electricity at Beesley's Point. Under terms of the consent order, the plant proposes to shut down one coal-burning unit, repower a second coal-burning unit to a combined-cycle natural gas turbine, and refuel a third oil-burning unit with natural gas.

The overriding objection to the pipeline by environmental groups is that the memorandum of agreement proposal among the Pinelands Commission, the Board of Public Utilities and the B.L. England plant would violate the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, which disallows such development in the Pinelands Preservation areas.

"The CMP allows limited public development by public agencies in the forested region," Theresa Lettman, director of monitoring projects for the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, said during a telephone interview. "South Jersey Gas is not a public agency. The Board of Public Utilities is stepping in as a go-between. It's an unlawful extension of a governmental agency process."

mercury emissions from the coal plant would lessen the mercury impact on lakes and streams in the Pinelands, protecting the fish and the animals that eat the fish. It would also lower risk for fishermen; fishing is prohib-

ited in many lakes or ponds in the region because of the mercury content.

But Lettman said the DEP is comparing the coal-fired plant's emissions when it was operating at full power, rather than the operating history of

Within the Pinelands Area, the gas main is being proposed to pass within the Pinelands Village, Pinelands Rural Development and Pinelands Forest management areas. It would be installed within the existing paved portions and/or existing disturbed rights-of-way of Union Road (CR 671), N.J. Route 49, Cedar Avenue, Mill Road (CR 557), N.J. Route 50, Mount Pleasant-Tuckahoe Road (CR 664) and New York Avenue. It would begin in Maurice River Township.

Connecting the Beesley's Point plant to natural gas will increase the operation of the plant, which currently is put in operation only during peak demand times – May through September. That could cause more pollution, said Lettman, because although it would no longer use coal, the plant will be in use year 'round.

According to the draft MOA available on the Pinelands Commission website, [state.nj.us/pinelands/](http://state.nj.us/pinelands/), there would be air quality benefits to the Pinelands once the B.L. England plant is converted from coal to natural gas. A DEP model suggests there would be a 40 percent reduction in the existing background concentrations of sulfur dioxide. Reducing sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides means there would be less potential of acid rain formation and ozone concentrations, leading to healthier plant life and wildlife in the forested areas and greater visibility. A 94 percent reduction in allowable

DEP MODEL SUGGESTS THERE WOULD BE A 40 PERCENT REDUCTION IN THE EXISTING BACKGROUND CONCENTRATIONS OF SULFUR DIOXIDE.

recent years. And if the plant were decommissioned altogether, there would be no more pollution from the site.

The benefits to the consumers of electricity seem equally impressive in

Continued on Page 36

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## Pinelands Pipeline

Continued from Page 28

the memorandum of agreement. According to the New Jersey Energy Master Plan, the goal is to promote a portfolio of clean and cost effective in-state electricity. The B.L. England plant contributes 45 percent of the power grid load within the Pinelands Region and would contribute 86 percent of the load after the scheduled shutdown of the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station in 2019.

Lettman said she has heard the master plan did not include B.L. England as an answer to the region's energy problems once Oyster Creek is retired.

In a recent discussion, South Jersey Gas has agreed that if the pipeline project is approved, SJG would mitigate environmental damage to the roadsides in the forest areas by contributing \$8 million to the Pinelands Commission — \$7,250,000 going for land preservation and \$750,000 for an educational visitors center at the Pinelands Commission headquarters in New Lisbon.

From 1988 to the present day, there have been 19 instances of Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan deviations through memorandums of agreement, such as those to allow the Garden State Parkway widening from Toms River to Somers Point; stringing high-tension wires along the Parkway; for the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey master plan; and the business park and municipal landfill closure in Stafford Township, Ocean County.

Monday's public hearing was the next to last chance for people to voice their opinions, said Pinelands Commission spokesman Paul Leakan. The last opportunity will be during the Pinelands Commission meeting at 9:30 a.m., Friday, Dec. 13, at the headquarters in New Lisbon. Written comments may also be sent until Friday.

Once all the opinions have been heard, the commission will make its decision on the memorandum of agreement, possibly on Jan. 10.

— Pat Johnson

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