

# Pipeline plan concerns Pinelands advocates

## Pipeline along Route 49 would serve BL England plant

A natural gas explosion in a rural Oklahoma pipeline last week caused a fire that lasted more than seven hours and could be seen for 50 miles.

While no one was injured and the cause remains under investigation, that scenario concerns environmentalists who oppose a South Jersey Gas proposal to run part of a natural gas pipeline through the Pine Barrens and three counties.

The \$90-million line would run alongside Route 49 from Millville to Tuckahoe and on to Beesley's Point in Cape May County.

It would service the aging and polluting BL England generating station, which must convert from coal and oil to cleaner natural gas to stay in business.

The station has been fined more than \$1 million by the state for air and water pollution violations during the past 10 years and has one coal unit getting fined \$3,000 when it runs.

### **Pinelands threat**

The Pinelands Commission is reviewing the proposed pipeline, which the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, the Sierra Club and the Don't Gas the Pinelands Coalition oppose.

The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) and the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) already have issued permits for the line, but they have no jurisdiction over the commission.

"This is the biggest threat to the Pinelands since the Pinelands Commission was created more than 30 years ago," said Jeff Tittel, New Jersey Sierra Club director.

He and others question the commission's pursuit of a comprehensive master plan waiver with the state BPU — not South Jersey Gas, the applicant — in order to approve the plan.

“It is both illegal and immoral because the Pinelands comprehensive plan simply does not allow this type of infrastructure, and commission officials have acknowledged it violates the plan,” Tittel said.

His organization filed a lawsuit against the state last month for issuing a repowering permit to the generating station allowing for the discharge of superheated water into Egg Harbor.

South Jersey Gas executives said the pipeline was proposed because Texas-based RC Cape May Holdings, which operates BL England, had requested gas service.

They also describe the high-pressure, 24-inch-diameter pipeline as a backup or redundancy line for gas users in and out of the Pinelands, in case the only major pipeline along the shore goes out of service.

South Jersey Gas spokeswoman Joanne Brigandi said the line would enhance the reliability of gas service to 60,000 customers in Cape May and Atlantic counties.

The company has never had a pipeline explosion.

“Even though we have a BPU and DEP order, we still need Pinelands Commission approval to be able to implement this project,” said Bob Satzinger, senior vice president of engineering services and system integrity for the gas company.

He said three routes were examined — including another through the Pinelands — and the one selected has the least impact on threatened and endangered species and residents. Two-thirds of the 15 Pinelands miles would pass through forested area.

Nearly all of the pipeline would be placed in the shoulder along Route 49 and would not require removal of any trees, except a dozen the state Transportation Department would like to see removed because of roadway hazards, according to Satzinger.

The pipeline would be buried four feet deep, deeper when it must cross multiple times under the Maurice River system.

Crossings would be drilled and range in length from 1,150 to about 2,400 feet at a depth of 56 to 62 feet under the roadway. That requires use of a slurry mixture of mostly water

and clay-like Bentonite that Satzinger said clings to sand and is removed once a hole is opened.

But that doesn't satisfy pipeline opponents.

"The New Jersey Devil is trying to invade the Pine Barrens, and if this gets approved, it is here to stay and can only wreak havoc on New Jersey's jewel," said Georgina Shanley, a spokeswoman for the Don't Gas the Pinelands Coalition.

"Can you imagine a fire or a leak?"

### **Waiver dispute**

The coalition represents more than three dozen environmental groups, including Water Watch and the New Jersey Environmental Federation.

"A fire like the one in Oklahoma from an explosion could be deadly to the forest," warned Theresa Lettman of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance. Tittel, Carlton Montgomery, Pinelands Preservation Alliance executive director, and other opponents say the pipeline also does not conform to the Pinelands plan because no one within it will tie into the line or otherwise directly benefit.

Environmentalists say the master plan waiver — a memorandum of understanding the Pinelands staff has been asked to prepare — is intended only for governmental agencies applying for infrastructure projects such as roads. The BPU is not the pipeline applicant, they point out, and also is not a governmental agency but merely a regulatory one.

Pinelands Commission Executive Director Nancy Wittenberg disagrees.

"Is the waiver a way around it (the comprehensive plan regulations)? Not true," she said.

A memorandum can be with the BPU because a precedent was set by the commission when it approved a previous waiver with a public utility for electricity transmission lines along the Garden State Parkway.

The pipeline waiver was pursued with the BPU, she added, because the South Jersey Gas application was not consistent with the master plan.

If the implementation and policy committee chooses to take the next step in the pipeline proposal, a public hearing would be scheduled as required by the comprehensive management plan.

That hearing would be followed by a comment period and a full commission vote, Wittenberg said.

But she doubts the staff report would be ready for the committee's Oct. 23 public session in Pemberton Township

In its June permit approval for South Jersey Gas — months before the Pinelands staff was directed to prepare a memorandum — the BPU said it “anticipates signing” the memorandum.

Meanwhile, opponents even question the need for the line, given that four other generating stations already are under construction in New Jersey. They also oppose South Jersey Gas bringing in fracked gas from the Marcellus Shale operation in neighboring Pennsylvania, drilling under streams and using slurry.

Dan Lockwood, a South Jersey Gas spokesman, said the company anticipates getting gas from that source as well as from the Gulf Coast.

But Bob Allen of Upper Township, a professor at Cumberland County College, said the Pinelands is a one-of-a-kind ecosystem the commission is charged with protecting.

“Linear construction and its heavy equipment can have impacts — like on trees that have root systems that extend under the Route 49 right of way,” he added.

“And anything that tampers with the ecosystem can ultimately tamper with the underground aquifer.”

Allen suggested BL England look to renewable energy such as wind.

Dr. Steven Fenichel of Ocean City worries that emissions of the ultra-fine particles from gas burned 24/7 at BL could have a negative health impact.

“I think they (Pinelands Commission) are fast-tracking this all for the profits of South Jersey Gas Co.,” he said.