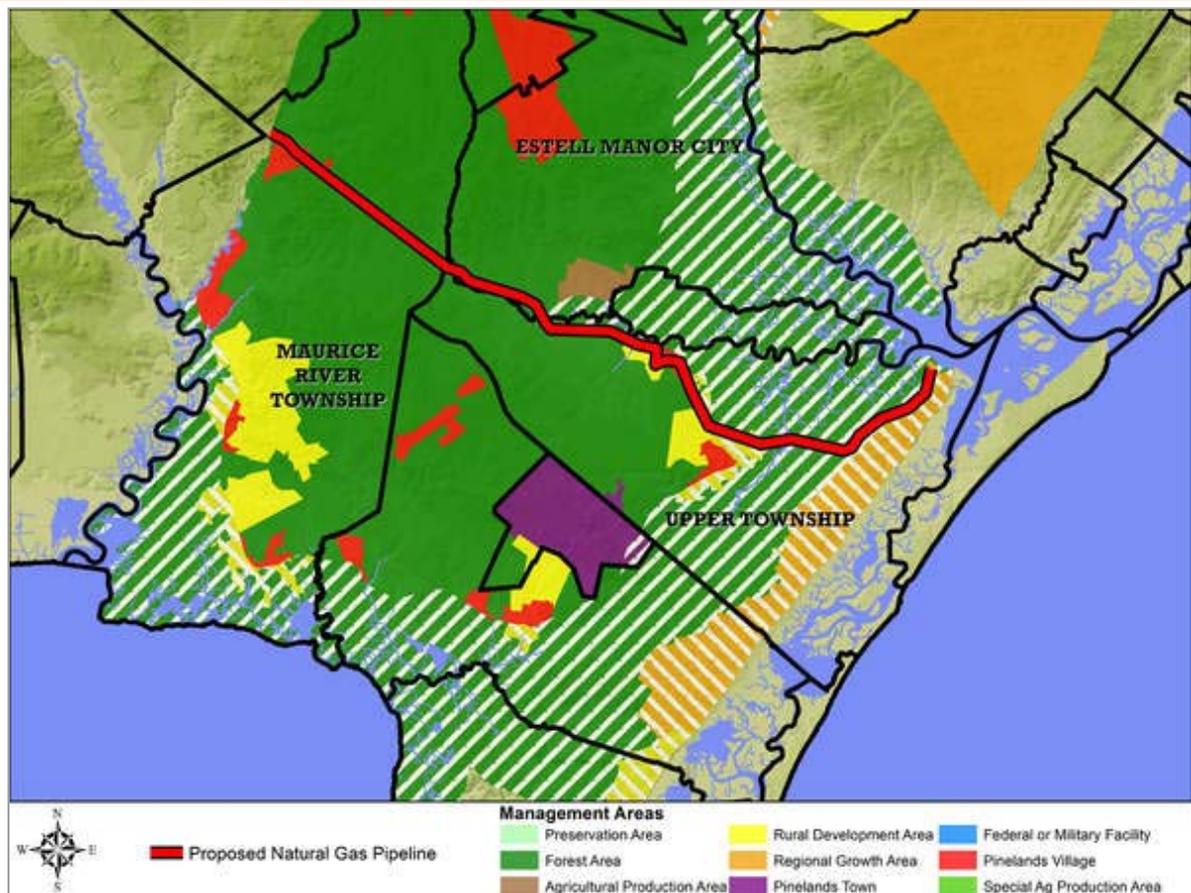


Proposed Natural Gas Line in the Pinelands Gathers Opposition

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About 70 people attended a New Jersey [Pinelands Commission](#) subgroup meeting on July 26 to voice their opposition to a proposal by South Jersey Natural Gas to build a liquefied gas pipeline through the Pinelands from its port in Morris River Township to the existing Beesley's Point coal-fired electric generation plant in Upper Township, Cape May County.

The commission's Policy and Implementation Committee met last Friday and heard positive recommendations from the Board of Public Utilities but made no decisions nor did they take any actions, said Pinelands Commission spokesman Paul Leakan.

The BPU has approved the project, saying it is necessary to meet to 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 outside of the Pinelands Area. The pipeline would be installed at varying depths below ground.

According to Leakan, the proposed gas main is intended to supply natural gas to the Beesley's Point electric generation plant owned by B.L. England to comply with part of a New Jersey 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 the terms of the consent order, the plant proposes to shut down one coal-burning unit, repower a second coal-burning unit to combined-cycle natural gas turbine, and refuel a third oil-burning unit with natural gas," said Leakan.

But [Pinelands Preservation Alliance](#) Director Carlton Montgomery said Leakan left out an important bit of information. “One essential fact that was left out of Leakan’s information is that connecting the Beesley’s Point plant will increase the operation of the plant that currently is put in operation only during peak demand times,” said Montgomery. “It will cause more pollution because it will be in use year ’round.

“Also, the DEP order does not require them to build a natural gas pipeline. The order tells them to either shut down or convert to natural gas, but only if they want to keep the plant in operation, and it doesn’t say where the natural gas should come from. It could come from up north as well. This is just the cheapest route.”

Montgomery said the overriding objection to the pipeline is that it would violate the comprehensive management plan that disallows such development in the Pinelands preservation areas. “The Pinelands rules forbid this, they (the commission) can’t do this, and there is no basis to waive the rule except that there are powerful players and money behind it.”

Montgomery said the proposal brought to mind the fight to keep the Conectiv high tension power line out of the Pinelands in 2004. Eventually it was redirected to follow the Garden State Parkway and although some areas of sensitive Pinelands areas were cut down along the GSP, the state was doubly compensated for the loss with money going to preserve other properties.

Within the Pinelands, the gas main is being proposed partially within the Pinelands village, Pinelands rural development and Pinelands forest management areas, and 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, Mt. Pleasant-Tuckahoe Road (CR 664) and New York Avenue. It would begin in Maurice River, Cumberland County.

“They are saying they will keep it along the roadways, but there would be destruction of forest and pose a danger to the environment, and then there is the maintenance issue. I’ve been doing some research and there are gas leaks and explosions all the time in these types of pipelines. But the primary destruction would be to the CMP itself, affecting development issues – the ‘if you build it, they will come’ theory,” he said.

BPU representatives fielded questions about the proposal during the Policy and Implementation Committee meeting. The committee anticipates additional discussion about the project at future meetings. Public comment is welcomed at all of the Pinelands Commission meetings, said Leakan.

— Pat Johnson

patjohnson@thesandpaper.net

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