

DAN RIVER

THREAT: Two major gas pipeline projects

STATES: North Carolina, Virginia

SUMMARY

The Dan River supplies clean drinking water to roughly 1 million people and is a vital lifeline for an abundance of wildlife. But the construction of two major gas pipelines threatens drinking water sources and wildlife habitat. The governors of Virginia and North Carolina must ensure that pipeline construction meets all Clean Water Act safeguards to ensure the health of the river and its communities.

THE RIVER

The Dan River originates in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and meanders east for 214 miles, crossing into North Carolina, where it joins the Roanoke River at Kerr Reservoir. The Dan River is full of wildlife including freshwater mussels, otters, and migratory fish, and is home to many endangered species like the James spiny mussel and the Roanoke logperch — all of which are essential to the river's dynamic ecosystem. The Dan River is also a critical water source, supplying drinking water to nearly 1 million people along the North Carolina-Virginia border.

Long before state boundaries or reservoirs existed, the Dan River was — and remains — a living relative to Indigenous peoples of the region. The river has sustained the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, the Saura, and related Siouan-speaking peoples for countless generations. The river's banks hold ancestral village sites, burial places, fishing grounds, and ceremonial landscapes that continue to shape Indigenous cultural identity and responsibility today. For Indigenous nations, the Dan is not merely a water source or wildlife corridor; it is a living system in which reciprocal responsibilities exist.

THE THREAT

The greatest threat to the Dan River is the convergence of two major gas pipeline projects — Transco's Southeast Supply Enhancement Project (SSEP) and Mountain Valley Pipeline's Southgate Project (MVP Southgate). These pipelines will put clean drinking water for hundreds of thousands of residents at risk, disrupt critical wildlife habitat, and desecrate Indigenous cultural sites. Threats to the Dan River include ongoing cleanup efforts from Duke Energy's 2014 coal ash spill, real estate development, proposed data center development, and existing industrial sources along the river, including Duke Energy's Belews Creek coal-fired power plant.

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TAKE ACTION:

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The communities and ecosystems of the Dan River are already experiencing harm and face escalating risks if pipeline projects move forward. Local communities that rely on the Dan for drinking water, farming, and cultural practices are in harm's way. Construction of these pipelines could make access to clean drinking water uncertain for these communities due to the buildup of mud, sediment, and chemicals, while blasting and trenching along the pipeline's route could destabilize riverbanks and increase the risk of flooding.

In 2014, the Duke Energy coal ash spill released toxins that

settled into the riverbed and infiltrated the river's food chain, creating long-term uncertainty about drinking water and fish safety. The Dan River and surrounding communities cannot afford to have another preventable tragedy like this happen again.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

The permits for SSEP and MVP Southgate have already been issued. We are urging Gov. Spanberger of Virginia and Gov. Stein of North Carolina to ensure their state agencies enforce Clean Water Act requirements during the construction of these pipelines and hold the pipeline companies to the highest standards for protecting the Dan River and the clean water that communities need. We also urge state agencies to meet with Indigenous leadership from State and Federal Tribal Nations to understand the potential risks and impacts of pipeline construction for Native communities.

The Clean Water Act requires states to ensure that the construction of major interstate pipelines like these will comply with state water quality standards. State agencies must enforce these standards to ensure local communities have access to clean drinking water, Indigenous land is honored, and wildlife habitats remain intact.

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