

The Constitution Pipeline Threatens Several Rare Bat Species

Fact Sheet • April 2015

Among the adverse environmental impacts from building the Constitution Pipeline — a 124-mile transportation system for moving fracked Marcellus shale gas from Pennsylvania into the Northeast market¹ — is potential harm to several rare species of bats, one of which is federally identified as threatened and another as endangered.² According to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), “Construction and operation of the pipeline could impact bat species through direct mortality if clearing affects occupied roost trees, or indirectly through habitat loss and disruption.”³ Yet in early December 2014, FERC granted Constitution Pipeline permission to begin construction of the interstate natural gas pipeline.⁴

Importance of Bats to North American Ecosystems

Bats play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity, by cross-pollinating flowering plants and scattering the seeds of native plants.⁵ They also have an important function in controlling insect pests; a little brown bat, for example, can consume 3,000 insects in a single night, including insects that damage crops.⁶

Five species of bats live within the project’s range.⁷ Among them is the Indiana bat, which has been listed as an endangered species for nearly 50 years.⁸ More recently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced on April 1, 2015 that the northern long-eared bat would also be protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as a threatened species.⁹ That same day, the International Petroleum Association of America released a press release opposing the new FWS rule, arguing that it would limit oil and gas industry activity.¹⁰

The other three species include the little brown bat, with protection status currently under review by the FWS; the small-footed bat, considered “threatened” in Pennsylvania and a “species of concern” in New York; and the silver-haired bat, a “species of concern” in Pennsylvania.¹¹

Pipeline construction is temporary, but the damage is long-lasting. Legal agreements between landowners and pipeline companies require that landowners continue to keep the area cleared, causing sustained forest fragmentation.¹²



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This results in less forest cover for wildlife habitats, leaving wildlife more vulnerable,¹³ and in potentially fewer trees for bats to perch upon.

Pipeline construction can cause sedimentation in waters affecting aquatic insects that are a part of many bats’ diets,¹⁴ while noise pollution interferes with bat navigation, making it

difficult for them to locate insects.¹⁵ According to a biology instructor in North Blenheim, New York, the Constitution Pipeline could “disrupt the ecology” relied on by the Indiana bat.¹⁶ In general, pipelines pose huge risks of leaks. When leaks go undetected, from inadequate detection systems or monitoring personnel’s failure to identify a rupture, a leak could go for hours or even days.¹⁷ This means that even after construction is completed, the bats will remain at risk.

The Constitution Pipeline Must Be Stopped

Pipeline expansion facilitates oil and gas drilling and fracking,¹⁸ which jeopardizes the environment¹⁹ and exacerbates climate change,²⁰ all in exchange for dubious public economic benefits.²¹

Allowing the build-out of sprawling pipeline infrastructure simply locks in decades more of U.S. dependence on dirty fossil fuels. Instead of allowing the Constitution Pipeline to be developed, the East Coast — and the entire United States — should be weaning itself off fossil fuel consumption through policies that will lead to a sustainable, renewable, clean energy future.

Endnotes

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- 11 FERC (October 24, 2014) at 4-109.
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