

FPL pipeline done, but when will it pump natural gas?

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The [Palm Beach Post](#) has published the following article regarding Sabal Trail. Proponents of the pipe give several incorrect statements here regarding the need for this pipe.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

JUST IN: FPL pipeline done, but when will it pump natural gas?

[business](#)

By [Susan Salisbury](#) – Palm Beach Post Staff Writer



Catherine Doe, right, of West Palm Beach, joins gas pipeline protesters outside of Florida Power and Light headquarters on Universe Boulevard in Juno Beach on Oct. 14, 2016. Groups oppose the 515-mile Sabal Trail Pipeline starts in Alabama and will bring fracked gas through several counties in Florida's springs and wetlands. (Richard Graulich / The Palm Beach Post)

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After just nine months, construction is complete on the \$4 billion 685-mile natural gas pipeline slated to begin delivering fuel to Juno Beach-based [Florida Power & Light's](#) South Florida plants by May 31.

But controversy over the massive project continues – and it's not clear when the spigot will be turned on allowing FPL another source of natural gas for its power plants.

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The pipeline's owners have asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to allow it to start operating by Wednesday. But on May 18, the Sierra Club asked FERC to delay the flow of gas until completion of a legal challenge it filed last year in federal court seeking a review of the agency's approval of the pipeline.

WHEN PROTEST TURNED DEADLY: [Sabal Trail pipeline shooter killed by law enforcement in Citrus County](#)

The pipeline is actually part of a much larger enterprise, the Florida Southeast Market Pipelines Project. It includes the 515-mile \$3.2 billion Sabal Trail Pipeline from Alabama to Central Florida, the \$550 million 126-mile Florida Southeast Connection pipeline from Central Florida to FPL's Indiantown plant and Transcontinental's \$459 million 48-mile Hillabee Expansion project in Alabama, as well as six new compressor stations.

NATURAL GAS: [Group says Florida too reliant on natural gas; FPL disagrees](#)

FPL says the state's other two pipelines are at capacity, and it needs more cheap, clean natural gas to generate electricity for the state's growing population. FPL's transition to natural gas to produce about 70 percent of its power has enabled the company to retire older oil and coal-burning plants.

[The project has been widely opposed by environmental groups](#) and residents of the communities along the route. They have asserted that the pipeline will harm the Florida Aquifer, which supplies water to millions of people in Florida and Georgia, and could damage wetlands, scenic rivers and wildlife habitat and pose a safety threat.

Sabal Trail spokeswoman Andrea Grover said of the start-date request, "This request covers the initial capacity that is about

half of the planned full phase-one capacity that is ready to provide service to Florida Power & Light for the start of their peak cooling season.”

Oral arguments in the case filed by The Sierra Club, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and Flint Riverkeeper were held before the D.C. Circuit on April 18. Questions were raised about FERC’s consideration of the pipeline route’s impact on low-income and minority communities, greenhouse gas emissions from power plants the pipeline will supply and the 14 percent rate of return allowed.

Sierra Club attorney Elly Benson said Wednesday, “A decision is expected soon, and the Sierra Club requested that FERC not grant any requests to put the pipeline into service while the court challenge remains pending.

“In March we submitted a letter urging FERC to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement. In that letter, we noted that the environmental impacts from project construction have proven to be far more environmentally destructive than FERC contemplated or disclosed to the public,” Benson said.

Placing the pipeline into service before the court has issued a decision on the case’s merits and giving FERC time to act should action be required would deprive the petitioners of their right to meaningful review by FERC and the D.C. Circuit, Benson said.

The Sierra Club’s request covers the entire pipeline, including the 126-mile southern portion owned by Florida Southeast Connection. Like FPL, the company is an affiliate of NextEra Energy Inc.

FPL spokesman Dave McDermitt said, “We have requested they give us permission to start operations as of May 31. We are looking for a fairly prompt decision by then. We have said all along we

were looking for a late May start date. It would take another decision by FERC to grant the Sierra Club's request. That would be unprecedented."

McDermitt called The Sierra Club's request for the delay a "last gasp" by it to attempt to prevent the vitally needed pipeline from benefiting the people of Florida.

In a May 23 letter to FERC, Sabal Trail asked FERC to deny the request to delay the start date. Doing so would delay fuel delivery to FPL, the state's largest electric utility, and to other markets in Florida and the greater Southeast market.

Sabal Trail attorney P. Martin Teague wrote, "Additionally, as Sabal Trail has previously demonstrated, staying the project at this late hour would cause substantial harm to Sabal Trail, FSC, and Transco, who have invested more than \$4 billion to build this critically important natural gas pipeline infrastructure."

Delaying the project would harm the public interest, including end-users of natural gas and electricity, Teague stated, as the commission has already determined that the project is needed.

The pipeline will be Florida's third major pipeline. At a hub in Osceola County, it will connect with pipelines operated by the Florida Gas Transmission Company and Gulfstream Natural Gas Pipeline. They operate more than 6,000 miles of pipeline. By 2021, the new pipeline will have the capacity to deliver approximately 1.1 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day.

FPL's McDermitt said, "The demand for natural gas to support energy generation has increased not only for FPL, but for Florida as a whole – rising from less than 40 percent in 2007 to approximately 65 percent or more, and it is expected to continue near this level. Natural gas demand for non-utility businesses and residences has also increased substantially."

Without an additional pipeline to deliver essential natural gas, utilities would be on track to revert to burning more oil and/or coal as the only 24-7 alternatives with available generating capacity, McDermitt said.

Timeline: Sabal Trail and Florida Southeast Connection Pipelines

The 515-mile Sabal Trail pipeline originates in southwestern Alabama and will transport natural gas through Georgia and Florida, terminating at a hub in Osceola County. It interconnects there with the state's two existing pipelines. The 126-mile Florida Southeast Connection pipeline goes from there to FPL's Indiantown plant, which has a pipeline connected to FPL's Riviera Beach plant.

The project also includes Transcontinental Gas Pipeline's Hillabee Expansion. Together the three portions are known as "Southeast Market Pipelines." The Hillabee expansion's purpose is to transport Marcellus-shale gas, or "fracked gas" from Transco's main pipeline to south-central Florida.

2009: The Florida Public Service Commission rejects FPL's \$1.5 billion proposal for a 300-mile pipeline within Florida and orders it to rebid the project.

December 2012: FPL issues a request for proposals for new natural gas infrastructure, saying more natural gas is needed to supply the state.

July 2013: FPL selects Spectra Energy to build the pipeline's northern stretch, Sabal Trail. FPL's parent company NextEra and Spectra's Sabal Trail Transmission form a joint venture. NextEra creates a new affiliate, Florida Southeast Connection, to build the southern portion.

The pipeline will travel through four Alabama counties, eight

Georgia counties, and 13 Florida counties.

Fall 2013: Sabal Trail and Florida Southeast Connection begin the permitting process with the Federal Energy

Regulatory Commission.

Florida PSC approves FPL's request to charge customers for fuel and transportation costs beginning in 2017.

December 2014: SpectraBusters, an umbrella group of dozens of allied organizations, is formed. They oppose the pipeline, saying it will be massive, invasive, environmentally damaging and is unnecessary

May 2015: Duke Energy buys a 7.5 percent ownership stake from Spectra.

October 2015: Audubon Florida takes a neutral stance on the pipeline, reversing what it said was a previous erroneous statement that it strongly supports the pipeline.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says it has environmental objections to much of the proposed route, and an alternative should be selected.

December 2015: The EPA reverses its stance, saying the project addresses wetlands and other issues.

FERC says the pipeline will have some adverse environmental impacts, but they will be reduced to less-than-significant levels with proposed mitigation measures.

February 2016: FERC authorizes the pipelines' construction and operation.

Calgary-based Enbridge completes a \$28 billion acquisition of Houston-based Spectra Energy.

August 2016: Construction begins.

September 2016: The Sierra Club and other groups file in federal court challenging FERC's approval of the project.

May 2017: Pipeline companies ask FERC to allow it to begin transporting gas in the pipeline.

The Sierra Club asks FERC to delay the start until after pending litigation is resolved.