

FERC sets eight public meetings in September on draft EIS

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July 26, 2019

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has scheduled eight meetings around the state in September to hear public comments on the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed Alaska LNG project.

“The primary goal of the public comment meetings is to have you identify specific environmental issues and concerns with the draft environmental impact statement,” FERC said in its July 26 announcement. “All verbal comments will be recorded by a court reporter and become part of the public record.”

FERC released the draft environmental review on June 28. Public comments are due by Oct. 3. Allowing time for state and federal agency review, along with revisions to the draft, the commission’s schedule calls for release of the final EIS in March 2020 and a commission vote on the project application in June 2020.

The state, which has been by itself directing the estimated \$43 billion project for almost three years, plans to finish the work with FERC and then put the effort on hold until it sees a way forward with private companies in the lead.

The public comment meetings will run Sept. 9-12, with sessions in two different communities each day. All meetings are scheduled for 5 to 8 p.m.

- **Monday, Sept. 9**
 - Inupiat Heritage Center, Utqiagvik
 - Trapper Creek Elementary School, Trapper Creek
- **Tuesday, Sept. 10**
 - Kisik Community Center, Nuiqsut
 - Houston Fire Station, Houston
- **Wednesday, Sept. 11**
 - Tri-Valley Community Center, Healy
 - Nikiski Recreation Center, Nikiski
- **Thursday, Sept. 12**
 - Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center, Fairbanks
 - Dena’ina Center, Anchorage

FERC will lead the meetings, not the project applicant Alaska Gasline Development Corp. (AGDC). “Other federal agency representatives may also be in attendance and available to answer questions,” FERC said.

In addition to the eight FERC meetings, the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will hold two public sessions on subsistence issues. Those meetings are scheduled for “potentially affected communities.” BLM will be looking at the effects of construction and operation and how they fit under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Those meetings are scheduled for 6 to 9 p.m. at:

- Anaktuvuk Pass Community Center, Tuesday, Sept. 17.
- Kaktovik Community Center, Thursday, Sept. 19.

Comments on the draft EIS can be filed electronically through the eComment feature on the ferc.gov website. “This is an easy method for submitting brief, text-only comments,” FERC said. Longer comments or submissions with attachments can be submitted through the eFiling feature on the website. Additionally, people can mail comments to: Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary; Federal Energy Regulatory Commission; 888 First Ave. NE, Room 1A; Washington, DC 20426.

All comments should include the project’s docket number: CP17-178-000.

FERC staff is available to help with filing comments online: Call 1-866-208-3676 or email ferconlinesupport@ferc.gov.

The 3,800-page draft EIS determined that the project would damage areas of permafrost and wetlands and could affect migrating caribou and six endangered or threatened wildlife species — referred to as “adverse impacts” — but many of the effects could be reduced or eliminated if the right steps are taken during construction and operation to avoid, minimize, or repair the damage.

FERC is the lead on the environmental review of the state-sponsored project to pipe North Slope gas 807 miles to a natural gas liquefaction plant and marine terminal in Nikiski on the Kenai Peninsula.

The draft EIS was prepared with the assistance of nine other federal regulatory agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, Army Corps of Engineers, and Bureau of Land Management.

The state has been leading the project since North Slope oil and gas producers ExxonMobil, BP, and ConocoPhillips decided in late 2016 to stop writing big checks for regulatory and engineering work. Now the state, through AGDC, has decided it, too, needs to slow down spending. The state corporation plans to finish the FERC process and try putting together a project without the state in the lead.

AGDC earlier this month announced it would lay off more than half its staff, shutting down its effort to find customers and investors.

“We’re going to have just enough people to get this thing done (FERC) and at the end of next (fiscal) year in June, then we take a look and say, ‘Where do we go from here?’” AGDC interim president Joe Dubler told the state House Resources Committee on July 19.

At that point, AGDC will re-examine the state’s future participation in the project, Dubler said, according to a July 24 report in the Alaska Journal of Commerce.

Dubler also told legislators that AGDC did not renew the nonbinding joint-development agreement it had with three large nationalized Chinese firms to buy up to 75 percent of the project’s LNG output in exchange for an equal share of financing. The project envisioned in the agreement “frankly doesn’t exist anymore,” Dubler said, explaining the Gov. Mike Dunleavy administration is not comfortable with the risk the state would assume as project leader, the Journal of Commerce reported.

The agreement was signed in front of President Donald Trump and China President Xi Jinping in November 2017, promoted as a signature achievement in then-Gov. Bill Walker’s effort to secure partners for a state-led Alaska LNG project.