

## Wildfires and Disaster Response

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening. My name is Gary Strong. I am a resident of Horizons Village in the pathway of the Appalachian Trail South Alternate Pipeline Route.

On January 22, 2009, the Virginia Department of Forestry conducted a wildfire hazard assessment of Horizons Village, rating it on a scale between “High Risk” and “Extreme Risk.” **5 significant contributors** to this assessment are:

1. The topography of our community with:
  - a. a **large number of pine trees** surrounding many of the homes; and
  - b. **steep slopes** within the community whereby fire would easily spread upslope;
2. A **single road for entry and egress**;
3. The proximity to Wintergreen Resort. A wildfire within the community could easily spread uphill and **endanger Wintergreen Resort** and the millions of dollars it brings into Virginia;
4. The limitations of rural responders, particularly **limited access to water**; and
5. A **longer response time** owing to the distance from fire and rescue stations.

Added to these, a **highly combustible natural gas pipeline** through any part of Horizons Village would **increase the risk of wildfires** in the community.

- The **potential for fire** exists during both construction and during use as gas flows through the pipe.
- According to the Pipeline Association for Public Awareness, the recommended minimum **evacuation distance** for a 42-inch natural gas pipeline is over 3,000 feet. Thus, every resident of Horizons Village would have to evacuate the neighborhood via our single access road.

Due to our high risk for wildfires, the Virginia Department of Forestry assisted Horizons Village to become a “**National FireWise Community**.”

- The VA Department of Forestry also provides us **annual grants for wildfire hazard mitigation**.
- They picked us **precisely because of the high risk** of wildfires in our community.
- Now, on top of existing risks, the proposed pipeline would only **increase the risk of wildfire** in our community.

In conclusion, the proposed pipeline **cannot be built through such a high risk zone as ours**, but must be routed instead through already-existing easement zones where such risks do not exist. Our community is a classic case study of where not to put a pipeline.