I am Kirk Bowers, retired civil engineer, resident of Albemarle County, Va and native of Roanoke County, VA. I am here to witness to injustices proposed to be enacted upon the people of Appalachian culture by two proposed large diameter fracked gas pipelines. The ACP and MVP.

I believe we are profoundly connected to the land and culture and stories of our ancestors in ways we don't fully realize. Their experiences, their sorrows and joys are knit into our bones, woven into the fabric of our very bodies. We can't fully understand the impact of these connections until we stand on the land and speak the language of those who came before us and gave us the gift of life.

I am deeply connected to Appalachia through my ancestry. The first of my ancestors came to Jamestown in 1622 and were among the first settlers of Appalachia in the 1700’s.

Appalachia is a region whose geographical boundaries exist not because of any legal boundaries, but because of the shared history, culture, and environment of mountain people in eastern North America. The land is rich. Our remaining mountains are home to one of the most biologically diverse regions on the planet.

The Appalachian region, while abundant in natural resources and rich in potential, lags behind the rest of the Nation... its people have not shared in the Nation's prosperity. Appalachia has long struggled and been associated with poverty. There is a pervasive sense in Appalachian communities that the region is considered a National sacrifice zone for corporate interests. Logging and Big Coal have plundered thousands of acres of land, ripped the tops off hundreds of mountains, extracted the land’s wealth, poisoned its streams and rivers, and left the people destitute.

Now, we have two proposed fracked gas pipelines that would cross our mountains, streams, Forests and rural Appalachian communities. These pipelines fragment our forests and permanently scar the landscape, our mountains and disrupt our communities. They are being imposed on people and communities as part of a corporate scheme to continue the exploitation of rural communities in Appalachia. The pipelines pass through these communities, but provide no service, no gas to rural residents.

The pipelines are being built to gain substantial profits, as much as 14% rate of return, for their corporate stockholders. All gain for the corporations at the expense of rural Appalachian communities. The gas is not needed. We have studies that show existing pipelines have the capacity to provide adequate supplies of gas for all regions of Virginia beyond the year 2030.

The proposed pipelines would irreparably harm impacted communities, especially those that are “culturally attached.” Cultural Attachment is the cumulative effect over time of a collection of traditions, attitudes, practices, and stories that ties a person to the land, to physical place, and to kinship patterns.

In a culturally-attached area, land is not valued as a commodity or an investment. Where people are culturally attached to specific land or to a specific place, normal mitigation of the loss is not possible. Its loss cannot be mitigated through monetization, or by the receipt of comparable land.

Connected to these places are stories and values that create a bond with one’s home. A resident of Craig County told me that “Our people are attached to the valleys and mountains all around us. It’s been our home for generations. We love the land, the place…people offer us money for our land but we don’t sell it. We just don’t want to be cut off from the sacredness of our land”.

Many of these lands in the culturally attached areas have been in the same family for hundreds of years. In areas of high cultural attachment, a relatively undisturbed area where people actively support their culture through daily choices, an intrusion such as a pipeline, four-lane road, or other major project would be highly intrusive.

We are concerned that FERC rejected performing a regional assessment of Cultural Attachment during the NEPA review process. We are further concerned that a concession was agreed to that FERC tasked the EIS contractor to perform Cultural Attachment studies only on lands within the US Forest boundaries. But no one lives within Forest Service boundaries.

The people of Appalachia would bear a disproportionate amount of environmental damage and cultural intrusion by the pipelines. There is no doubt in anyone’s mind that construction of these pipelines will negatively impact the scenic beauty of our mountains, our pristine streams, large blocks of forested areas and rural Appalachian communities.

The impacts cannot be mitigated by compensation or environmental mitigation. The mountains are already scarred by numerous power lines crossing over the mountains. We don’t need the pipelines. We have enough gas. Renewable energy will make the pipelines obsolete in 15 years. The pipelines would be built for short term profits and then abandoned.

This is another instance of injustice to our Appalachian communities and culture. Construction of the pipelines would serve to confirm the belief that Appalachia is a sacrifice zone. It is a continuation of exploitation of our Appalachian communities without any regard for our environment or culture.