

# The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

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## Trust eroding even further

Were you left shaking your head? So were we.

Dominion's back and forth with the U.S. Forest Service, as documented in today's Recorder, was a remarkable if confounding exchange — one that only deepens distrust in the company's ability to build its proposed multi-billion gas pipeline through three states.

Here's what went down:

- U.S. Forest Service officials for both the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia and the George Washington-Jefferson National Forest in Virginia thought they had made it clear to Dominion that soils and geology surveys needed to occur before Dominion picked a route for the pipeline and filed its application with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. But Dominion forged ahead with its application and route selection before those surveys were done.
- Forest officials explained the protocols for the surveys, and the requirements for professionals conducting them — all the way back to February. But Dominion didn't follow them.
- In May, Dominion's consultant asked forest officials for a list of contractors who would be qualified to conduct the soil surveys. Forest officials provided a list; Dominion didn't use any of them.
- At a July meeting, Dominion assured forest officials it would provide the resumes and credentials of people who would conduct the surveys to the USFS before they got started. That did not happen, either.
- Forest officials told Dominion to do the surveys this spring, May-July, because it was the best time to capture how soils respond in wet weather. Dominion didn't do that. By August, those officials complained to Dominion that it was starting its surveys too late in the summer to be adequate.
- USFS asked Dominion to provide a schedule of the field work for surveys, so its staff could make sure they were being done correctly. Dominion didn't do that, either, so USFS did not get a chance to inspect the work, and subsequently found it wholly inadequate.

- Finally, Oct. 16, Dominion’s contractor provided USFS with its list of folks conducting surveys, and their resumes. But forest officials found only one person on the list who was qualified under USFS requirements — and that person did not conduct any surveys.

What are we to conclude from this?

The forest service spent nine months trying to get Dominion to do the right thing with regard to forest lands, and it wasn’t until USFS objected that the company said — just a week ago — it would do a new round of surveys, intending to satisfy the forest service.

And when will that take place? Dominion says it would conduct them “at a date to be determined.” Based on what forest officials say, those surveys should be conducted in the spring of 2016. Even if that puts the project behind schedule, we think Dominion had better get the timing right and forest officials should insist. After all, it’s Dominion’s own fault for not getting this done at the proper time.

Dominion now tells us that “in a good faith effort” to meet the forest service’s expectations, the company submitted a list of certified professionals last week. Why does that sound like Dominion is doing everyone a big favor? Why didn’t it simply use the list USFS provided the first time?

Dominion also told us this week it is committed to working with the USFS to conduct a “thorough, com- prehensive and robust soil survey program.” Again we ask, why didn’t it do that the first time?

You would think a powerhouse company like Dominion would have the staff and money to do soil surveys properly, but it didn’t. And now it’s forced to do them over again. Thank goodness our USFS personnel are paying close attention, but it’s a shame they have to work so hard to get Dominion to comply. Dominion can’t even accurately present a simple list of soil professionals. Why should we believe it would effectively manage a project of this magnitude without serious detrimental effects to our land and water?

This is yet another example of Dominion failing to live up to its own expectations. The company has repeatedly assured us excellence in all facets of this project. So far, it’s failed to come close to anything we’d consider excellent.

Maybe we are expected to tolerate some degree of failure, and let the company slide here and there on the details.

If we do that, however, are we failing in our duties as stakeholders, citizens and officials? Is it our job to keep Dominion in line?

Yes, because we know from previous experiences that the agency charged with that responsibility – the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission — cannot be trusted to do so on our behalf.

Thank you to the U.S. Forest Service staff for holding Dominion's feet to the fire on proper surveying and other requirements. Thank you for protecting the public lands we have all invested in. Keep up your excellent work.

The increasing evidence that Dominion and FERC cannot get this right is daunting. The company continues to misrepresent what it has done or will do, and FERC looks the other way. The serious flaws in this process make it easier for Dominion to take advantage of us all. Let's not let that happen.

We are resigned to remain diligent, as are all the groups in the region who are watching ever so closely to each step Dominion takes. Combined, perhaps those who understand the consequences of this project will be able to reign in Dominion, and keep it honest.