

The Recorder

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River groups follow up with questions for DEQ

Editor's note: The following letter was sent June 11 to David Paylor, director of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, following Paylor's visit last week to Bath and Highland counties to see areas affected by the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, and shared with The Recorder. Director Paylor:

Many thanks for joining us Tuesday, June 6 to see firsthand why our watershed protection organizations, local politicians, landowners and others have serious concerns with the proposed construction and operation of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. If a picture is worth a thousand words, your site visit to Little Valley and Valley Center should have been worth many times that.

By visiting just two locations, we were able to present tangible evidence of the key (and as yet unresolved) risks associated with this project, namely:

- Construction on very steep slopes,
- Irreparable harm to sensitive karst formations,
- Interruption of both surface and subsurface water quality/quantity,
- Destruction of old growth forests,
- Significant economic harm, (and)
- Disfigurement of the beautiful Allegheny Highlands landscape.

As mentioned, here are questions that our group has compiled specific to the Department of Environmental Quality. Please ask your staff to help us with answers to these.

- We had heard that DEQ plans to hold public hearings in August of 2017 on Dominion's application for a Section 401 Water Quality Certification and you confirmed it last week when we met. Does DEQ anticipate that it will have a complete WQC application and that it will make the application available for public review prior to these hearings?

- Will the DEQ require that Dominion provide detailed site-specific Erosion and Sediment Control, stormwater management, and steep-slope stabilization plans as part of its WQC application? We saw examples of where these will be needed this week in Little Valley and Valley Center.
- Will DEQ require that the plans provided by Dominion as part of its WQC application include site-specific plan view and cross-section diagrams of corridor and access road construction, showing the extent of excavation, the disposition of spoil, and the locations and specifications for erosion and runoff control and slope stabilization structures? This has been requested and presented for two locations on National Forest land and is needed for private land, too. This is needed for both public and private lands.
- DEQ's April 6 comments to FERC on the draft EIS stated DEQ's concern that proposed temporary impacts to streams and wetlands could result in permanent alteration of impacted systems. DEQ recommended that Dominion conduct pre-impact characterizations to include sufficient evidence that these systems will maintain their original functions indefinitely after restoration. What does DEQ consider to be "sufficient evidence," and will DEQ require this evidence as part of Dominion's WQC application.
- DEQ's April 6 comments to FERC on the draft EIS recommended that Dominion perform dye-tracing studies to delineate subterranean flow in karst. However, DEQ stated that dye tracing studies should occur after route approval and should not affect routing of the pipeline. Does this mean that DEQ has determined that pipeline construction does not present a significant risk to karst groundwater systems like the ones we saw in Little Valley and that information on karst groundwater recharge areas will not be required as part of Dominion's WQC application?
- Will the DEQ require Dominion to prepare Stormwater Management Plans and provide these plans as part of its WQC application? We saw ample examples of why this is needed on Tuesday.
- Will the DEQ require that Dominion's WQC application include a listing of the specific streams where in-stream blasting will be required? If so, can we also have available maps and supporting documentation for each?
- Virginia imposes time-of-year restrictions for instream construction activity in trout streams and other streams with sensitive species. Dominion has indicated that it will adhere to these restrictions where "practicable," but that it may request waivers on a case-by-case basis. Dominion's plan for wintertime construction implies that waivers to time-of-year restrictions will be needed. Will DEQ require identification of streams where waivers will be needed as part of Dominion's WQC application?

Again, our thanks for your personal reconnaissance. Your efforts and those of your staff are greatly appreciated by all of us. We look forward to seeing you if not before, at the upcoming public hearings. Meantime, we'll be available to you and your staff to guide and assist any DEQ personnel in this part of the state. Our common objective is the protection of the environment for all Virginians.

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Jackson River Preservation Association

Richard Brooks, president,
Cowpasture River Preservation Association