



ABRA Update #2 – October 17, 2014

Forest Service Process on Surveying National Forest Land for the ACP

Greg Buppert, Senior Attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), has provided the following status report on the how the George Washington (GW) and Monongahela (MON) National Forests will proceed in considering a request for surveying in their respective forest lands for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

- We know that the GW and MON each received a “proposal” from Dominion to survey national forest lands for the pipeline on or around October 3. GW and MON staff are now reviewing the proposal to determine whether the agency will accept it or reject it. Federal regulations spell out a two-step screening process that the GW and MON must walk through in order to make the “accept or reject” decision. SELC’s recent letter to the agency focused on those screening criteria (see article below).
- If the GW and MON accept the respective proposals, it becomes an “application” subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Under 36 C.F.R. sec. 220.4(e), the GW and MON must evaluate the scope of potential impacts of the project and solicit input from the public. In NEPA lingo, this is called “scoping.” The agency has some flexibility in how it does this, but we understand that the GW and MON will ask for comments from the public during a designated comment period. We won’t know how long the comment period will be until we see the official notice, but it could be as short as two weeks.
- Once they have collected and reviewed comments from the public, the GW and MON will decide whether the survey request requires a more detailed analysis in the form of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or whether it can go forward without further environmental review. Because the Forest Service typically evaluates survey requests in isolation from the rest of the project, the GW may determine that Dominion’s request fits into one of its specified “categorical exclusions” and won’t require more analysis.
- Importantly, we are getting close to an official opportunity for the public to communicate with a critical decision-maker—the Forest Service—about the pipeline project. Comments do not have to accept the distinction between the survey and the rest of the pipeline project. We will share new information when we have it.

Status of Hiring a Communication Coordinator, Funding Help Needed

ABRA is in the process of hiring a part-time Communications Coordinator who will serve as a information gatekeeper and research assistant for our efforts. A \$22,000 budget for the first year for the position has been established. It will be funded by a foundation grant (2/3rd), which is currently under review, and contributions from ABRA member organizations (1/3rd). e already have pledges of \$1,000 each from Highlanders for Responsible Development and the Sheandoah Valley Network, and \$250 from the Augusta County Alliance. Additional expressions of an intent to contribute have come from Cooper Conservations Advisors LLC and the Southern Environmental Law Center. We would welcome additional pledges in any amount from other ABRA members. Funds will not be required to be paid until after the position has been filled. If you can help, please advise Lew Freeman, ABRA Steering Committee Chair, at lewfreeman@gmail.com.

Letter Sent to GW National Forest Opposing Surveying

A letter was sent October 13 to the Supervisor of the George Washington National Forest strongly urging “the Forest Service to reject an application from Dominion to survey for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.” Signing the letter were 14 representatives of the following ABRA members:

Augusta County Alliance
Allegheny Highlands Alliance
Cooper Environmental Advisors LLC
Cowpasture River Preservation Association
Friends of Nelson County
Friends of Shenandoah Mountain
Highlanders for Responsible Development
Shenandoah Valley Network
Southern Environmental Law Center
Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club
Virginia Wilderness Committee
West Virginia Environmental Council
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
Wild Virginia

A copy of this excellent letter, prepared by Greg Buppert of SELC, is attached to the email transmitting this Update. Kudos to Greg!

New ABRA Members

We are pleased to welcome 6 new organizations to the ABRA ranks, brining our members to 28. Their names and website links will be added to the ABRA website next week:

Appalachian Mountain Advocates
Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition
Friends of Buckingham County
Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation
Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club
Whitescarver Natural Resources Management, LLC

<p>Questions or comments: Contact Lew Freeman, ABRA Steering Committee Chair, at lewfreeman@gmail.com or 703-298-8107</p>
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