

# The Recorder

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## Endangered bee may sting pipeline plan

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER



*The critically endangered rusty patched bumble bee spends winters underground in Highland, Bath and Augusta where a gas pipeline is proposed. (Courtesy USGS Bee Inventory and Monitoring Lab)*

MONTEREY — Pipeline company Dominion may be facing another hurdle to its proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Tyler Bird Paul of Highland County on Tuesday informed the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission of a newly designated endangered species in the path of the proposed pipeline.

“It has come to our attention, and we wish to bring it to your attention, that the rusty-patched bumble bee has been added to the Endangered Species List as of January 11, 2017,” Paul said in her FERC website post. “You may see on the map at [xerces.org](http://xerces.org) that the rusty-patched bumble bee habitat is in Virginia, including Bath, Augusta and Highland counties.

“According to the Endangered Species Act, nothing is allowed to ‘knowingly destroy their habitat.’ I wish it added to the record that construction of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline will no doubt be knowingly destroying the habitat of the rusty-patched bumble bee in Highland County, Bath County and Augusta County, Virginia.”

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service placed the bee on the list of endangered species, making the rusty-patched bumblebee the first bee of any kind to be added to the list in the

continental United States, according to Wikipedia, which explains, “Most nests that are constructed by the bee are built underground, and are commonly found in old rodent burrows.” And, they are known to build their nests underground in locations such as ditches on the side of the road, wetlands, and fields, typically 16-18 inches below the surface, composed of soft dirt. The species requires three different types of habitats for foraging, nesting, and hibernating which are geographically close to one another, making them vulnerable to extinction. They require a temperate climate, but can withstand cold temperatures most species of bumblebees cannot. They have been found at elevations as high as 5,250 feet, Wikipedia says.

### *Forest service supported*

Also this week, David Bennick, president of Potomac Appalachian Trail Club- Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter, informed FERC the club supports the forest service “taking the time it needs to make a responsible and well informed decision on whether to issue a special use permit for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and amend the George Washington and Monongahela National Forest management plans.

“For this large and extremely consequential project, it is imperative that the Forest Service follow the laws and regulations in place and have access to all the information it needs to make a responsible decision,” he said.

The chapter is located in the Harrisonburg, Staunton and Waynesboro area. “Our club leads hikes and maintains trails along the 16-mile route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline through the George Washington National Forest,” Bennick explained. “We typically log 1,000-2,000 hours of volunteer work on trails in the Shenandoah Mountain area of the GWNF. Our club is opposed to the proposed ACP route, and we have been active in expressing our concerns in writing and by speaking at public meetings held by FERC. When we hike, we enjoy scenic views, cascading mountain streams, wildflowers, birds, and geologic features, and we especially appreciate the large, unfragmented tracts of national forest on the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Mountain. These tracts of wildlands offer supreme hiking experiences for the 10 million people who live within a two-hour drive of the GWNF. The ACP route cuts through some of the premier areas of the national forest for nature study and outdoor recreation.

“Our Conservation Committee has reviewed the draft EIS for the ACP and have found it to be incomplete and very misleading. Some of the most essential information for a responsible decision is missing. We are very concerned that Dominion and FERC are pushing to expedite this consequential project without allowing enough time for all the agencies and other parties involved to gather and submit critical information for analysis and review. A project of this magnitude cannot be evaluated quickly.

“As one example of misinformation, please note that the draft EIS states that the pipeline will not be visible from the proposed Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area. Our chapter has led a hike to a scenic viewpoint on Shenandoah Mountain on New Year’s Day of 2016 and 2017. The pipeline route would bisect the viewshed ... with a permanent utility corridor. (The chapter) supports Supervisor Clyde Thompson’s Dec. 13 letter stating the Forest Service does not concur with the expedited timetable set by FERC and that more time is needed. This is not just for convenience sake. More time is required by the laws and regulations the Forest Service must

follow. This pipeline is putting many fragile resources in the GWNF at risk. It is imperative that the Forest Service be given adequate time to work its way through the process carefully.

“Information, like biological surveys for sensitive species, detailed plans for high risk areas, and a more detailed engineering plan for the (horizontal drilling) through the Blue Ridge must be available before a decision is made, not after. If the Forest Service is forced to fast-track this decision without critical information, the agency will be vulnerable to objections, appeals and lawsuits. Thank you for your responsible stewardship of our national forests, and please take the time you need to assemble and review the necessary information. It is crucial that time for public participation be taken into account during this process.”

Bill Johnson of Fredericksburg told FERC he was grateful to the Forest Service “that you are taking a stand to protect both the forests and the communities along the proposed route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. It is appropriate that you want FERC to actually do their job and publish a complete and accurate draft EIS that addresses your and the public’s concerns. FERC’s allowing the applicants to defer submitting critical information until after a certificate is issued or construction is underway, leaves the Forest Service and the public without the information needed to evaluate the risks with this pipeline. FERC’s actions are further proof that they never met a pipeline that they didn’t like.

“It is critical that the Forest Service receive all requested and needed data and plans prior to making decisions on the project so that the public knows what it is in store for, should the applications be approved. Local communities that will be affected by the pipeline strongly support your commitment to its regulatory review process.

“It is critical that you stay committed to the process and professional standards you uphold as stewards of our public lands. You are our last resort - you must take the time you need and which the law demands, to meet these standards.

“The future depends upon your actions and I hope that you rise to the occasion and do the right thing,” he wrote.