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Dominion responds on Valley Center karst

Trump to fill three vacancies at federal agency

By John Bruce • Staff Writer



The solid red line on this map shows a route variation for Valley Center. (Courtesy Dominion)

MONTEREY – Dominion has identified a route variation to avoid karst features east of Valley Center Road for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

“Atlantic identified a possible alternate route variation between MPs 88.2 and 89.7 to avoid the Valley Center Road karst features,” Carole McCoy, director engineering services, said.

The Valley Center route variation leaves the baseline route at MP 88.2 and travels southwest 0.8 mile along the ridgeline of (Little) Mountain before turning southeast and paralleling the baseline route for 1.7 miles before rejoining the baseline route at MP 89.7.

The variation is 0.3 mile longer than the baseline (2.2 and 2.5 miles, respectively) and crosses one perennial waterbody whereas the baseline route crosses no perennial waterbodies.

“Additionally, the route variation crosses more areas of steep slope, side slope, and moderate to high landslide incidence areas,” McCoy said. “Crossing of other resources along the two routes is similar including one road crossing and one highway crossing. Field surveys along the baseline route did not identify any federally listed species. Access has not been obtained for surveying the possible route variation; however, similar species surveys would need to be repeated on the route variation if it is adopted. If federally listed species are found, Atlantic

would need to coordinate with the (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to determine appropriate conservation measures.”

“We’ve not adopted the variation and have not incorporated it into the route,” Dominion spokesman Aaron Ruby said. “FERC will evaluate it in the final (environmental impact statement).”

Trump to fill FERC seats

In other pipeline news, President Trump said Monday he’s nominating two Republicans to FERC. If confirmed, Neil Chatterjee and Robert Powelson would give FERC a quorum for the first time in three months. FERC is the lead regulator of the proposed pipeline planned to cross Bath and Highland counties.

Chatterjee is the top energy adviser to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), and Powelson has been a member of the Public Utility Commission of Pennsylvania since 2008. The appointments would keep the proposed pipeline’s final approval on schedule for this fall.

The news came as other pipeline-related developments occurred on the state level last week.

Petition filed

The Sierra Club announced in a news release it filed a petition with the Virginia State Corporation Commission stating that pipeline company Dominion’s deal with the Atlantic Coast Pipeline for capacity to ship fracked gas requires the commission’s approval. Dominion owns a 48 percent share of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which would carry fracked gas into Virginia and North Carolina. Dominion has an internal agreement with its majority-owned partnership, Atlantic Coast Pipeline LLC, to purchase large quantities of capacity on the pipeline for 20 years.

“This agreement should not move forward until Virginians are given the opportunity to have their voices heard,” said Kate Addleson, director of Sierra Club’s Virginia chapter. “Energy deals like this can only be approved if they will benefit Virginians, but the only thing Dominion has proved thus far is that it’s trying to shut the public and its own ratepayers out.”

Virginia’s Affiliates Act was established to ensure that all business deals between utilities and their corporate affiliates are in the public interest. Should a utility seek to conduct business with a subsidiary or corporate affiliate, it must first file an application with the commission. The commission must then review the transaction to ensure that it will actually benefit Virginians. Commission proceedings under the Affiliates Act are open to participation by affected parties.

In the case of the Atlantic Coast deal, every organization involved is fully or partially owned by Dominion or one of its subsidiaries. Therefore, the Affiliates Act requires the commission to review and approve the arrangement before it can take effect. However, Dominion has not submitted the deal to the commission for formal review and approval, indicating that it has no plans to do so. Yet, the commission’s review and approval is critical in this case.

The Sierra Club has serious concerns that Dominion’s deal with Atlantic Coast will incur exorbitant costs while cheaper alternatives are already available. Furthermore, the deal could

incentivize Dominion to rely more heavily on gas in the coming decades at the expense of smarter and cleaner renewable options and efficiency resources.

“As part of its plan to bring more fracked gas into the commonwealth, Dominion Virginia Power is seeking to acquire 20 years’ worth of pipeline capacity from its own corporate affiliate without prior commission review. This is a clear violation of the Affiliates Act,” said Andres Restrepo, an attorney with the Sierra Club. Dominion “cannot be permitted to sidestep the law’s requirements. This agreement must not be given legal effect unless and until the commission closely reviews and approves it.”

Crack in the wall?

Also last week, the Washington Post published a photo of pipeline opponents Lynn and Bill Limpert, whose property in northern Bath the pipeline would cross, and a story on a protest event at the Virginia governor’s mansion.

“Finally, a crack in the wall,” said Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition coordinator Rick Webb. Gov. McAuliffe was away that day on a trade mission to Mexico. His spokesman, Brian Coy, said the governor has the power to stop the pipeline only if environmental studies show that it threatens water quality, according to news reports.

Webb said Lt. Gov. Ralph Northam, who is running for governor, has urged the state’s Department of Environmental Quality to use a tougher, “site-specific” standard to review the project, a move McAuliffe supports.

“Until now, McAuliffe has refused to acknowledge that he has any power to stop the pipeline,” Webb said.