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Valley Center pipeline route variation no better

By John Bruce • Staff Writer



Campbell Spring Run is a surface stream flowing in Little Egypt from the recharge area that could be polluted by sediment from pipeline construction.

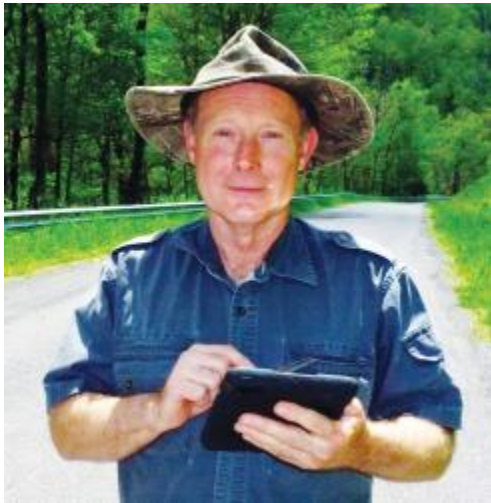
MONTEREY — Same problems, different area.

Cave authority Rick Lambert of Monterey surveyed the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline's route variation through Valley Center last week and concluded Dominion needs to avoid the karst topography there altogether.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission directed Dominion to reroute the study corridor away from Valley Center's karst formations. The company has identified, but not adopted, a new route. It would cross another equally vulnerable karst formation in Valley Center, Lambert said.

Dominion is refusing the recommendation of its geology consultant, GeoConcepts Inc. to follow a route avoiding karst, a route local landowners support, Lambert said.

“Dominion has moved the route from one complex interconnected karst system to another complex interconnected karst system,” Lambert said. “They have the same problems but in a different area. They need to cut their losses on Valley Center and move the entire route south of the Ordovician limestones.”



“Dominion has moved the route from one complex interconnected karst system to another complex interconnected karst system,” Lambert said, standing on a stretch of Valley Center Road where the route variation would cross.

Ordovician is geology lingo referring to the second of six periods of the Paleozoic Era. The Ordovician spans 41.2 million years from the end of the Cambrian Period 485.4 million years ago to the start of the Silurian Period 443.8 million years ago. The period is believed to be a time of the formation of continents. A side effect in some places was fissures and, over millions of years, limestone karst features such as caves, sinkholes and springs that supply drinking water.



The proposed route would traverse Highland’s Little Mountain. (Recorder photos by John Bruce)

A lot of the karst features are huge in Highland. Dominion has chosen “karst central” as its route, Lambert said. Close to the route variation is a 3,000-foot-long cave known as Huber Pit, which rises to ground level.

Dominion did not respond to repeated queries about the assertions. The company has said in past statements that it has made more than 300 route variations elsewhere so far.

“We have not come up with a firm plan on how to attack this route yet but are meditating on it daily,” Lambert said. “We found one sinking stream, many sinkholes, five springs, and two caves, one 520 feet long and the other over 3,000 feet long. The 3,000-foot cave has wide, high passageways which come to the surface as vents,” Lambert said.

“(Fellow caver) Mark Hodge and I just got back from walking the new proposed route, the Campbell Spring Recharge Area, which may be more than one recharge area,” Lambert said last week.

They recorded locations, using a GPS device, of many springs with the landowners and about half the sinkholes.

The Campbell Spring Recharge Area consists of many interconnected subterranean and surface waterways. Lightner Meadow Cave encloses a half-mile stream near the proposed route. Known caves are less than a tenth of a mile away, and Lambert said it is “highly likely” there are unknown caves within the proposed variation corridor.

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None of the caves along the route variation have been sampled for invertebrate fauna, which could include rare or endangered species. “These caves could contain an organism not found in any other valley,” Lambert said.

Nothing is known about the karst features on Little Mountain. “It’s basically because we’re lazy,” Lambert said. “Nobody wants to climb” the 70 percent slope to the top of this 3,200-foot elevation mountain.

To avoid known and unknown karst features, senior geologist Bob Denton of GeoConcepts Inc. recommended a route to the south avoiding karst, but the pipeline company is refusing to accept that option, Lambert said.

Denton, who works for the Ashburnbased consulting company hired by Dominion, informed Lambert about the company’s refusal May 6.

Denton’s route, supported by landowners, would run west of Little Mountain through Back Creek Valley. The route would be cheaper, safer, and more environmentally friendly than the current one, Lambert said.

“I don’t understand the vendetta Dominion has against landowners in Valley Center and Little Egypt,” Lambert said.

Dominion now faces a three-week delay, FERC announced last week.

Friday, May 12, FERC delayed the completion of the pipeline environmental impact statement from June 30.

“Staff sent an environmental information request to (Dominion) in April 2017, and only recently received the information necessary for us to complete our environmental review,” FERC said.

The new completion date is July 21.

“If a schedule change becomes necessary, an additional notice will be provided so that the relevant agencies are kept informed of the project’s progress.” FERC said.