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Address transparency concerns, Goodlatte asks

Access roads for pipeline unclear

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

BURNSVILLE — U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte has asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to respond to a Bath County resident's concerns about access roads for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Goodlatte on June 8 wrote Andrea Spring, FERC deputy director of external affairs, regarding concerns of Anne Bryan of Muddy Run Road, and asked to be copied into a response.

The action surprised Bryan, who suggested writing the congressman's Roanoke office now might yield results for others.

"I don't recall Goodlatte ever responding to any of my other letters with anything other than a generic letter of acknowledgment," Bryan said in an email after receiving a copy of Goodlatte's request to FERC. "Perhaps this is the time to submit concerns about access roads in our area to FERC with a copy to Goodlatte's office in Roanoke," she said.

The address for Goodlatte's Roanoke office is 10 Franklin Road SE, Suite 540 Roanoke, Va. 24011.

Bryan had earlier expressed concerns to FERC chair Cheryl LaFleur about what she called a "lack of transparency" regarding proposed access roads for the pipeline route, noting they were removed from the interactive online map on the Dominion pipeline website.

"At that time, Dominion posted: 'Data is continually being updated, and to avoid confusion, we are temporarily removing the access roads from the interactive map.' Removal of proposed access roads from the ACP online interactive map for a span of 11.5 months has, for all practical purposes, allowed Dominion to disenfranchise hundreds, if not thousands, of citizens in West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina,' Bryan said. "How are citizens to participate in this process with FERC; how can affected citizens communicate concerns with elected officials; and how can citizens work to ensure their water rights are protected in rural areas, if they are not aware that access roads are proposed to cross their property or to cross waterways affecting their well water sources?"

Bryan pointed to one example — the addition of Buck Run Lane in Burnsville as a proposed access road Dominion identified in a July 17, 2016 filing to FERC.

“Buck Run Lane is a private road serving as a driveway for seven residences in Bath County, Virginia,” Bryan explained. “On July 26, 2016, agents employed by Dominion are observed trespassing on Buck Run Lane by two property owners, Scott and Joyce Alexander; subsequently Joyce Alexander files a trespass complaint with the Bath County sheriff. An Aug. 12, 2016 letter written to Dominion and signed by all seven property owners on Buck Run Lane has yielded no observable changes in Dominion’s behavior. As of June 1, 2017, property owners on Buck Run Lane have not been contacted by Dominion, despite the fact that Buck Run Lane continues to be listed as a proposed access road in the May 11, 2017 filings to FERC.

“How can we, and others impacted by proposed access roads, have a chance to address concerns about proposed access roads if Dominion is held to a lesser standard of posting access roads only in the voluminous documents filed with FERC? If Dominion is interacting with citizens for whom Spanish is their native language, would documents in Spanish be employed to ensure clear communication?” Bryan wondered. “Is it too much to ask that Dominion honor the language of the common man who wishes to view access roads on easily-understood and readily available maps? Citizens who want to know about access roads are more likely to search Dominion’s online maps for information rather than dig through thousands of pages of FERC-filed documents. With a final Environmental Impact Statement due in approximately six weeks, how can Dominion gather data about areas to be impacted by hundreds of miles of access roads if residents along those proposed roads have not yet been contacted?”

“How can Dominion file a final Environmental impact Statement without addressing specifics for access roads, especially those to be constructed in karst areas and those which will affect streams, rivers, springs, and underground water sources which provide well water for citizens? My two recent requests to Carla Picard, Dominion, for updated figures regarding Bath County, Virginia, have not been answered as of June 1, 2017.

Bryan said the latest information she received from Dominion showed 22 miles of pipeline through Bath County, and 20.1 miles of access roads proposed in Bath.

“How many families reside alongside proposed access roads or own property on land to be crossed by proposed access roads? If our experience in Bath County, Virginia, is indicative of Dominion’s behaviors toward property owners and proposed access roads, what percentage of affected land owners have been contacted? If FERC has confidential filings regarding property owners and access roads, it is imperative that access road information be openly shared with citizens so that we may participate fully to protect our water rights. If our water is compromised, we in rural areas have little recourse and no other options for clean water,” Bryan said.

“Please hold Dominion to the highest standards possible and require that all questions regarding protection of springs, streams, rivers, and underground water be fully addressed prior to issuance of a decision by FERC,” she told the federal commission. “I petition FERC to extend the filing date for the final environmental statement 30 days until access roads are clearly posted for the public to understand and all questions about access roads have been addressed by Dominion and its team of experts.”

Goodlatte’s June 8 letter to FERC said, “I would appreciate your looking into this matter and providing me with a response for my constituent.”