

The Recorder

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Dominion no friend to landowners in region

Editor, The Recorder,

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline likes to publicly tout its “outreach” and cooperation with affected landowners. My wife and I don’t see it that way. We feel it more like a punch in the face, and we’re not going to take it.

Within days of receiving notification from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that the alternate route for the pipeline would cut our property in half, Dominion agents were calling us wanting come onto our property, even before they sent the required letters to allow them access.

We denied them permission.

Later, Dominion sent the required letters allowing them access to our property.

I sent a letter to Dominion advising that we would not grant permission to enter our property, but would not stop them if they came. I sent this letter because Dominion was publicly stating that many people were granting permission to survey.

I also advised in the letter that we would meet them and accompany them through our property, and they would be responsible under Virginia gas pipeline survey law for any damages to our property.

I specifically mentioned a large mountain laurel grove near the top of our property that should not be damaged. We also demanded that we promptly receive copies of all inspection findings.

In April of 2016 we received a phone call from Dominion’s agents advising that they would survey our property and adjacent properties. We agreed to meet them and accompany them during the survey. We drove down from Maryland to meet them, and our neighbors arranged to meet them as well. Dominion didn’t show up. I had to call them to find this out, and they said that they would survey in several weeks.

They didn't come back to survey in several weeks as they said they would. The next time we heard from them was four months later. It was a lawsuit against us for failing to grant them permission to survey. The trial was held another four months later.

During the trial the judge pretty much said that the lawsuit was frivolous, since Dominion agents already knew they had the right to enter our property. We considered the lawsuit as harassment, or bullying. The judge directed both sides to agree to survey dates, and that was agreed.

During this time period Dominion was consistently telling the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that surveys were not being completed because landowners were not giving permission, even though permission was not needed to survey. Dominion was blaming property owners for Dominion's own shortcomings.

Once again, we agreed to meet the surveyors and accompany them through our property. They arrived about a half hour late. We gave them another letter with the same basic information that we had sent in the earlier letter. The survey crew started walking up through my neighbor's property. I asked if they had permission to enter that property, and they came back, and walked up our lane as I was accompanying them. My wife joined us as well.

About halfway through the property, we spotted another survey crew coming down through our property from above. We were not advised that another crew had started at the top of the property, and therefore, they were unaccompanied by us. We complained about this deception, and lack of notification.

During this survey, we had a number of questions that the surveyors could not, or would not answer. At one point we showed them a sinking stream immediately adjacent to, and at the bottom of a very steep slope from the proposed pipeline. Survey crew members acknowledged the sinking stream. The sinking stream should be a prohibiting factor, or at least a limiting factor in pipeline placement in this location.

Several weeks passed without us receiving a copy of the survey findings, so I sent another letter demanding those findings, and the answers to the questions that we asked during the survey.

Two more months went by with no survey findings or answers. I contacted U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, who sent a letter to FERC on our behalf requesting the findings. Four months after the inspection I received incomplete and inaccurate survey findings from Dominion with no mention of the sinking stream.

I spoke to Ramona Kanouff of Dominion after spending about two hours finding a correct phone number for her. She was cordial, but she could not answer most of the same questions that I had asked the surveyors, even after researching the questions for several days. She could not explain why the sinking stream was not included in the findings, except to say that it should be reviewed in an upcoming karst survey.

Another survey date was announced. I accompanied a karst surveyor through our property, and showed him the sinking stream. My wife accompanied biological survey personnel. As I was

walking with the karst surveyor I noticed that mountain laurel bushes in our mountain laurel grove had been cut, apparently by the previous unannounced and unaccompanied survey crew, who came down from the top of the property over four months earlier.

I sent an e-mail to Ms. Kanouff, advising her of this damage to our property. She immediately stated that she would compensate us an undisclosed amount, even before I had a chance to document and inventory the damage. I declined, and told her I would get back to her after documentation and assessment of the damages.

My wife and I later climbed up the mountain and photographed and measured 48 mountain laurel bushes and two birch trees that had been cut for sighting along the proposed pipeline. Red ribbons were tied to some of the cut laurel bushes. These bushes could have been pulled and bent or staked out of the line of sight, but apparently the Dominion agents chose to cut them down. We plan to seek compensation for this property damage.

Five weeks had passed since the karst survey, and we had not received survey findings, so I was forced to send another letter to Ms. Kanouff. This was letter number 4 to Dominion demanding survey results. We have still not received those survey findings.

Dominion has still not conducted a geo-hazard survey on our property and has not told us when that survey is scheduled. This despite several large landslides within several hundred feet of the proposed pipeline on our property and in Little Valley that could easily expose the pipeline, and FERC's Environmental Impact Statement due to be issued in less than two weeks,

Long story short, Dominion is not reaching out to impacted property owners. They are doing their best to harass us, bully us, and keep us in the dark. After all, they have a lot to hide. We're not going to put up with it.

Bill Limpert
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