

Press Release from the Southern Environmental Law Center
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Conservation Groups File Challenge to National Forest Service's Hasty Decision
NFS Decision Fails to Protect Public Lands from Destructive Pipeline

Richmond, VA— Today, the Southern Environmental Law Center and The Sierra Club on behalf of a coalition of conservation groups filed suit in federal court against the National Forest Service over a grant recently issued to developers of the fracked gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

"Political pressure forced approval of this boondoggle through steep slopes and landslide-prone areas on a treasured national forest," said Southern Environmental Law Center Senior Attorney DJ Gerken. "Forest Service staff warned of the impacts this project would have, but the agency ignored them and granted special exceptions to let these pipeline developers get their way."

The Forest Service repeatedly requested additional information from developers yet moved ahead and approved this risky project with its questions unanswered. The pipeline is slated to cut through 20 miles of steep, rugged mountainous regions of national forest land in West Virginia and Virginia. Much of this land provides habitat for rare and endangered species and is land that is regularly used by hikers and campers.

"The terrain which developers propose to cross with this pipeline is completely inappropriate for this kind of project," said Sierra Club Attorney Nathan Matthews. "This fracked gas pipeline would cause permanent damage to the public lands that are so important to West Virginia's and Virginia's natural beauty. It is reckless to threaten the pristine land and tourism economy of those states with a dirty, dangerous project that they don't even need."

Pipeline developers have yet to receive all the permits needed for this project, including a water certification from Virginia meant to ensure protection of sensitive waterways. The Forest Service should not allow any work to move forward on national forest lands until this project is fully permitted.

Today's petition was filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit on behalf of the Cowpasture River Preservation Association, Highlanders For Responsible Development, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, Shenandoah Valley Network, Sierra Club, Virginia Wilderness Committee, and Wild Virginia.

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For more than 30 years, the Southern Environmental Law Center has used the power of the law to champion the environment of the Southeast. With over 70 attorneys and nine offices across the region, SELC is widely recognized as the Southeast's foremost environmental organization and regional leader. SELC works on a full range of environmental issues to protect our natural resources and the health and well-being of all the people in our region. www.SouthernEnvironment.org

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3 million members and supporters. In addition to helping people from all backgrounds explore nature and our outdoor heritage, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit www.sierraclub.org.