

The Recorder

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Power bills, access at issue

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BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — The Southern Environmental Law Center announced the Virginia State Corporation Commission on Monday accepted evidence that the cost of Dominion’s plans for building the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline would be passed on to Virginia ratepayers.

“The expert testimony describing the \$2 billion increase in customer costs that will result from this unneeded pipeline was submitted before the commission in a hearing on behalf of our clients, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Appalachian Voices, and the Chesapeake Climate Action Network,” SELC said in a news release. Dominion earlier projected annual savings of \$377 million.

“This is proof positive that Dominion’s pipeline will not cut costs to customers but instead increase our bills,” said SELC attorney Will Cleveland. “It’s further evidence that Dominion’s original promise – that the pipeline would save customers money and spur job growth in the commonwealth – has disappeared.”

The news comes as Dominion’s pipeline developer partner, Duke Energy, recently announced the price tag of the ACP increasing from \$5 billion to between \$6-\$6.5 billion, calling into question how much higher customer bills will go, the release stated.

“Although the commission accepted into evidence that customers will pay billions extra for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, the commission’s order overlooked several other areas that impact customer’s wallets, such as Dominion’s flawed energy forecasts that lead directly to over-investment in unnecessary and expensive projects in Virginia. The SCC will have another opportunity later this year to address just how much Dominion will be allowed to charge customers for the pipeline.”

Curbed access

In addition to customer bills, public monitoring of pipeline preconstruction activity in, and safe access to, the George Washington National Forest became an issue this week, with a citizens' group asking the U.S. Forest Service about the official policy.

The proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline route extends through national forests in Virginia and West Virginia.

The questions began when Jack Wilson of West Augusta asked if motorized access was allowed after he spotted vehicles at a nearby forest road gate and was told they were permitted.

Lew Freeman of Hightown, president of Allegheny Blue Ridge Alliance, followed up with USFS officials and had yet to hear about any written policy as of Tuesday.

Wilson further asked how the public could safely access recreation areas during possible ACP construction about rules for cutting trees in high winds.

Freeman learned the Monongahela National Forest had posted a notice of selected road closures for up to 120 days. "There is not at this time a similar alert regarding the George Washington National Forest, but I have inquired if one is in the works," Freeman said, adding a forest service employee informed him answers had not yet been signed.