

# The Recorder

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## Valley Center is central proof ACP must move

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Valley Center is a geological treasure. (Recorder photo by John Bruce)

It doesn't matter if you are for or against the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline (and, yes, it is still proposed) — the beleaguered vision of Dominion Energy and bubbly financed by a bunch of the world's biggest utilities. If you think tonight's public hearing (6 p.m., Highland High School gym) is a joke or a done deal, you're dead wrong.

Highland County's planning commission and board of supervisors deserve to applause for making Dominion come forth, finally, to give citizens a chance to express themselves. This is despite a perfectly bland bowl of pabulum offered to planners by a paid consultant who simply mimics Dominion's sales pitch.

Highland's comprehensive plan is more important than many people think. One weak link in the chain is all it takes to jeopardize it. In this case, Valley Center was left out of the picture. In all the hundreds of thousands of confusing bits of information pushed from Dominion to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Valley Center gets consistently and, might we offer, intentionally, overlooked.

Huge mistake. Valley Center is a geological treasure. The plain fact is: this pipeline, as proposed, would destroy it.

The company wants you to forget about Valley Center. And for good reason. Another major rerouting hurdle hurts a project that has gone from \$4.5 billion to at least \$6.5 billion, to the annoyance of investors and partners. Dominion's PR machine has been crusading about doing the right thing, but putting that call into practice will be another matter. They haven't begun to see the light.

### **Rejected advice**

The amount of money needed to correct the Valley Center dysfunction will cause ACP costs to skyrocket again. Valley Center spells turmoil for this project — Dominion neglected its own environmental contractor's recommendation to move the route away from the huge Valley Center karst features.

Will FERC pay attention? Of course not. FERC already certified the project, and it went through a lengthy environmental process at exorbitant ratepayer expense to do so, pushing aside a mountain of valid ratepayer concerns. Remember: this body of federal bureaucrats operates on the tab of utilities, meaning you, the people who pay their bills. FERC railroaded the destruction of 35 miles of mountaintops in Virginia and West Virginia to approve its applicant's favored route. Valley Center is another matter, entirely. And FERC got it wrong, entirely.

Information from Rick Lambert of the Virginia Speleological Survey proves Dominion has no concern whatsoever about the environmental hazards the ACP would create if built as proposed. In violation of its own best management practices, the company and FERC rejected expert advice from the state and a private contractor who recommended it reroute the pipeline away from Little Valley.

### **For the record**

Let's look at the chain of messages leading to certain proof of Dominion's outright neglect.

On Feb. 27, 2018, Lambert received an email from Bob Denton of GeoConcepts — Dominion's hired geological advisor and karst contractor — concerning a cave in Valley Center they found during recent surveys. It did not appear in the Virginia Speleological Survey's database because Lambert had not yet turned over the information on it to the VSS, though it was reported to FERC.

In the process of exchanging emails, Denton informed Lambert he was still trying to convince Dominion to move the route south of Valley Center and needed all the information Lambert had on the area to present his case.

From Denton to Lambert on Feb. 27: "I'm still recommending that they detour south completely around the nose of the plunging anticline and out of the carbonates, so the more data I have the better."

From Denton to Lambert on March 7: "The route we've been recommending would run the center line along the pediment of Little Mountain, on the east side of the Back Creek Valley. It would then cross Lower Gap, and ascend Little Mountain south of the gap, continuing a short ways southwest along the mountain top before descending and continuing east across the hills at

the southwest end of the Valley Center Anticline, then ascending Back Creek Mountain where it would rejoin the original route on the mountain's east slope.

“This route would place the centerline approximately 1.5 miles southwest of Valley Center, and crossing the valley where it is mapped ... The issue we're running headlong into is that FERC approved the original route through Valley Center, which complicates matters somewhat,” Denton said.

We have reported on the Valley Center route before.

“FERC is allowing Dominion to route the pipeline through approximately seven karst features on the Bird property which is a violation of their best management practices,” Lambert told us.

On April 2, 2017, two GeoConcepts employees reported to Lambert that they recommended a route around the karst areas of concern in Highland and Bath, but Dominion rejected it.

In August last year, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation sent a letter to FERC where it had picked two routes bypassing Valley Center and other karst areas.

The latest emails show the problems GeoConcepts is having with Dominion. “Dominion apparently is refusing to take the advise of their own karst contractor, DCR's karst experts, and us. This shows a lack of genuine concern for the environmental problems this pipeline is going to create,” Lambert told The Recorder this week.

“While we applaud GeoConcepts' attempt to spare the Bird property, their new route is only marginally better than the current route. It still impacts the karst aquifers on Little Mountain and the springs and streams down gradient of the pipeline. With the current route, the ACP will potentially impact 12 springs on the east side of Little Mountain.

“The new route as proposed by GeoConcepts will potentially impact 26 springs on the east slope of Little Mountain,” he continued. “Dominion needs to take a long hard look at the long route recommended by DCR, the state agency, on page 9 of their August 2017 letter, which bypasses Valley Center, Little Valley, and Burnsville Significant Karst area.”

This is blatant, if not criminal, neglect and fraud on the part of Dominion and FERC.

Highland County should reject any application from Dominion that calls for determining this project conforms to our comprehensive plan, and call them out for what they're actually doing: working in cahoots to destroy your natural resources to generate profits for investor benefit.

This proposal does not conform with the comp plan. It does not “provide good stewardship of our natural resources.” It does not address “the karst terrain and various other components set out in the natural resources section and found along the project's alignment.” County officials must reject this application and hold its ground. Our ground.