

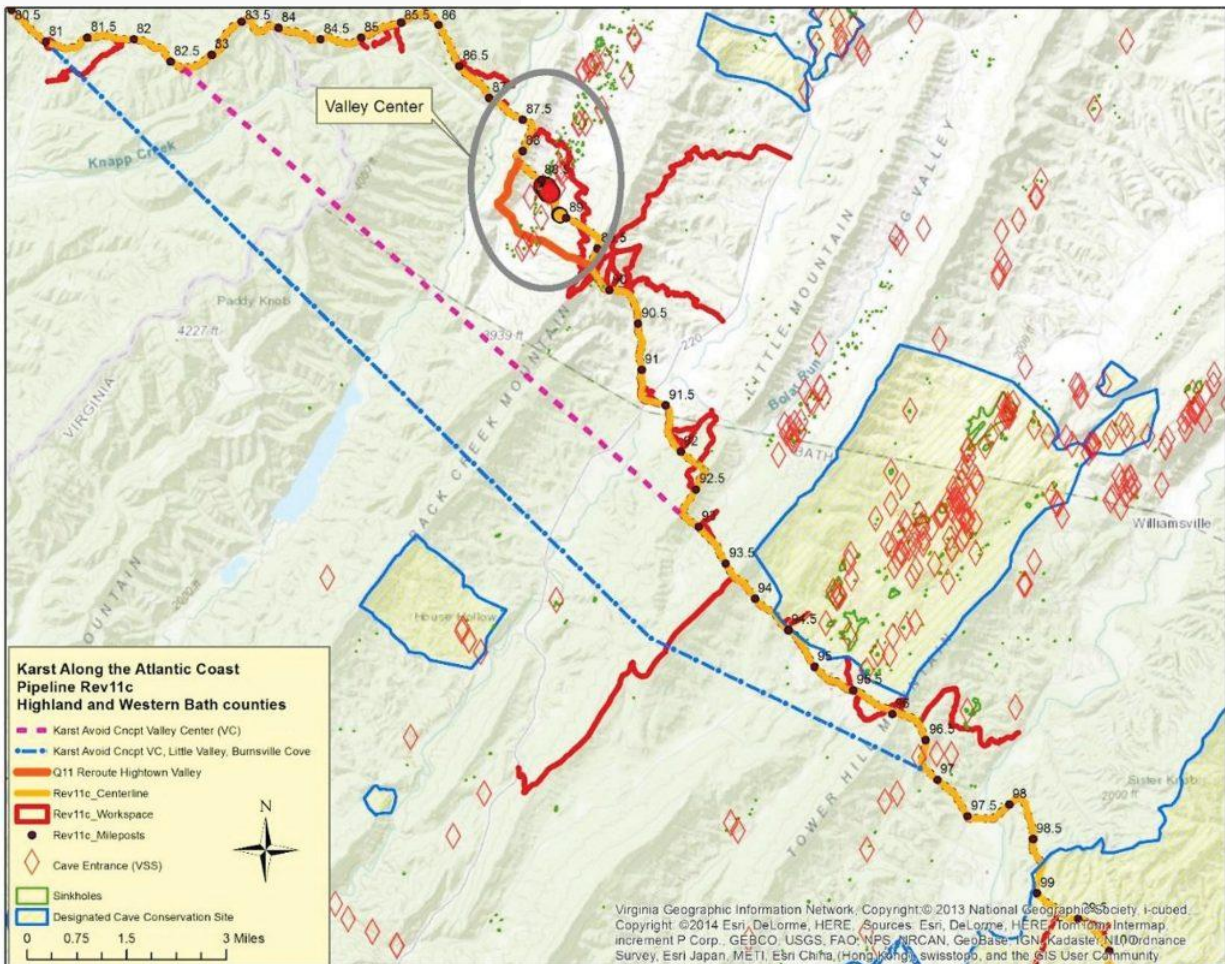
The Recorder

Inclusive, independent, indispensable.

Media told karst damage from project is certain

May 02, 2018

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER



On this map, the blue line shows a conceptual route to avoid cave and karst in Valley Center and Little Valley. (Map courtesy Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation)

VALLEY CENTER — Members of the media on Friday, April 27 were treated to a first-hand view of areas of concern in Bath and Highland counties that the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline would impact.

Rick Lambert of the Virginia Cave Board led a contingent up and down hills across the pipeline corridor on the Bird Property east of Valley Center Road where he said the route violates the company's best management practices and contradicts its paid geological engineering consultant's advice to avoid karst topography.



Sinking Stream Cave was among the first geological features visited along the pipeline route.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline LLC managing partner Dominion Energy chose not to follow a recommendation by GeoConcepts to wholly avoid Valley Center and the great concentration of karst terrain there, particularly under the landscape on the media tour Friday.



Lambert showed the group Dever Spring Run. (Recorder photos by John Bruce)

Pipeline Compliance Surveillance Initiative, a program developed by Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance and its member organizations, sponsored the day-long tour of Valley Center, Townsend Draft, Jackson River and Little Valley-Jack Mountain.

The concentration of karst under the Bird property makes it certain construction on the route as currently proposed would damage complex limestone spring and cave systems, Lambert said. The company said it would stay 500 feet away from karst features, but its current map shows the route will go right through them, he added.



Crawdad Ponor is close to the pipeline route.

“Our big question is why did they (Dominion) propose best management practices when they don’t intend to follow them?” Lambert said. “They have no intention of following them.”

Within a stone’s throw of the proposed pipeline centerline are Sinking Stream Cave, Rock Well Cave and Crawdad Ponor, along with a previously unknown sinking stream, numerous sinkholes and other cave and karst features.

“Supposedly if they find a hole, they’ll stop work,” Lambert said. “But we don’t know.” He noted there is a good chance endangered species will be found along the proposed route.



Lambert found a previously unknown ponor, or siphon hole.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ignored recommendations to avoid Valley Center, including a proposed route that would avoid Townsend Draft, Valley Center, and Little Valley by rerouting southward on the West Virginia Plateau to the northern end of the Bath County Pumped Storage Station property.

Lambert, ABRA executive director Lew Freeman, and Appalachian Voices communications director Cat McCue thanked landowner Lloyd Bird for allowing access to the property.

Lambert was doubtful when later shown a video on the ACP website portraying a person identified as Ted Lewis, described as a “karst expert,” denying pipeline construction damage of karst.

“Who is Ted Lewis? We don’t know him. He is not a member of the National Speleological Society. He has never published a paper in the Journal of Cave and Karst Studies. Ted Lewis, in my opinion, is not a karst expert. He is a professional engineer. He has a BS in agricultural engineering and an MS in civil engineering. Where is the karst? Where is the geology?” Lambert asked.