



Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter

June 7, 2018

Members of the State Water Control Board
c/o Office of Regulatory Affairs, Department of Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 1105
Richmond, Virginia 23218
citizenboards@deq.virginia.gov

Re: Inadequacy of U. S. Army COE NWP-12 for the ACP

Dear Chairman Robert Dunn and Members of the State Water Control Board:

The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club – Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter (PATC-SSVC) submits the following comments to the Virginia State Water Control Board regarding the inadequacy of the Army Corps of Engineers NWP 12 for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP).

PATC-SSVC is located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in the Harrisonburg-Staunton-Waynesboro area. Our club leads hikes and maintains trails along the 16-mile route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline through the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) and along the Appalachian Trail in the Reeds Gap area. In addition to hiking, PATC-SSVC typically does 1,000-2,000 hours of volunteer work on trails in the Shenandoah Mountain area of the GWNF each year.

The pipeline excavation would pass through some of the most environmentally sensitive streams and rivers in public lands in Virginia. A major construction project like the ACP is equivalent to constructing a new interstate highway across undisturbed mountains and streams and is not appropriate for coverage under the blanket NWP 12 that's intended for routine utility crossings.

The Water Control Board has a duty to protect our state waters, including those flowing off of and within our public lands. We ask that you fulfill your duty and exercise your authority to call for the DEQ to conduct a stream-by-stream analysis of the ACP crossings and call for site specific plans at individual crossings that will protect the water quality standards of Virginia's rivers and streams.

When we hike, we enjoy scenic views, cascading mountain streams, wildflowers, birds, and geologic features, and we especially appreciate the large, unfragmented tracts of

national forest and the many wild, undisturbed streams on the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Mountain. These tracts of wildlands offer supreme hiking experiences not just for our club, but for the 10 million people who live within a two-hour drive of the GWNF. The ACP route cuts through some of the premier areas of our public lands for scenic beauty, nature study, and outdoor recreation, including backpacking, birding, fishing, hunting, paddling and mountain biking. We do not want to see the water in these special places degraded by construction of the ACP, nor do we want to see municipal and residential water supplies endangered.



SSVC hikers crossing Ramseys Draft not far upstream from ACP crossing. Photo by Lynn Cameron

Our comments focus on impacts to recreational areas in the GWNF and along the Appalachian Trail:

- **Water Resources:** The ACP route crosses 26 native brook trout streams in the GWNF alone. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the ACP does not fully examine the impacts on these streams and therefore the DEQ cannot use the analysis presented there to justify relying on the ACOE NWP 12 conditions alone to protect the water quality from ACP construction. PATC-SSVC is particularly concerned about streams in four areas:
 - - **Hankey Mountain – Braley Pond area:** Ramseys Draft, Braley Branch, Calfpasture River, Dowells Draft, and White Oak Draft. These are streams where we have been leading hikes for over 30 years. The ACP route crosses Braley Branch within sight of the Braley Pond access road, and will permanently degrade water quality and the scenic beauty that attract so many fishermen, campers, hikers, mountain bikers, and naturalists. The steep slope at this crossing has had landslides in the recent past.
 - **Dowells Draft Area:** Many of our hikes are along Dowells Draft and the East Branch of Dowells Draft. The ACP and a major access road will cross

these streams several times. Dowells Draft Access Road has existing unstable slopes that we have documented.

- **Sherando Area:** Sherando is the most popular developed recreation site on the GWNF. Back Creek, which is crossed by the ACP, is one of the attractions at Sherando. SSVF has many picnics and hikes at Sherando Lake and the surrounding area and all enjoy the unspoiled views of Back Creek on hikes and driving to and from there. The HDD tunneling under the Blue Ridge opposite Sherando Lake will directly impact several small tributaries to South Fork of Back Creek with sediment runoff. It will be very difficult to contain all of the drilling mud and chemicals from the tunneling and keep all of it out of the streams.
- **Cowpasture River:** We hike on Southern Shenandoah Mountain and enjoy bald eagles, river otters, and other wildlife along the pristine Cowpasture River, one of the cleanest and healthiest rivers east of the Mississippi. Both the pipeline and access roads would degrade the Cowpasture River and its tributaries.
- **High Hazard Areas:** The FEIS identified over 100 possible slope instability hazard locations along the proposed ACP route. Of these it identified 46 areas that met the criteria for further evaluation as geohazards. Many of the high-hazard areas combine steep slopes, unstable soils, and problematic bedrock types. These conditions set the stage for severe erosion and harmful stream sedimentation, particularly during severe rain events. The most significant event was Hurricane Camille in 1969, but severe rainfall events that cause landslides have happened an average of every 9 years since 1949, with the frequency increasing in this century. One stream crossing of particular concern is the White Oak Draft area of Hankey Mountain which has >80% slope. Our club has several hikes on White Oak Draft Trail each year and we cross the stream several times near the ACP crossing.
- **E & S Plans Inadequate** Dominion had not presented adequate erosion and sediment control plans with enough detail for meaningful analysis and those submitted do not have the necessary controls and practices to protect streams in this extreme terrain.
- **No Justification for “Reasonable Assurance”** The FEIS does not provide adequate analyses on impacts to streams. The DEQ has not received all of adequately detailed plans from Dominion called for in the conditional 401 Certificate issued in December 2017. They have not had a chance to conduct their own analyses to justify “reasonable assurance” that water quality will not be degraded. The one-size-fits-all permit conditions of the ACOE NWP 12 fall far short of providing the protections needed to ensure that water quality is maintained in thousands of stream crossings.

- Appalachian Trail Crossing:**
 We are very concerned about the AT crossing which would involve drilling 4,639 feet through the Blue Ridge 800 feet below the crest of the mountain using Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) technology. If this should fail, Dominion will use a combination of open trench and Direct Pipe Installation (DPI) 200 feet below the summit. Both the HDD and DPI methods involve substantial risk of failure and environmental damage, given workspace limitations and the topographic and geologic characteristics of the proposed drilling locations. The FEIS has not provided sufficient information to discern whether this operation could be successful. The HDD drilling could impact ground water that intercepts the tunnel and ground water and surface water streams on both ends such as South Fork Rockfish River.



View of western HDD entry point from Torry Ridge Trail in the Sherando Area. Photo by Malcolm Cameron



SSVC hikers on AT near ACP crossing. Photo by Lynn Cameron

The pipeline route would bisect this viewshed from Bald Ridge Trail in Ramseys Draft Wilderness. Below are Braley Branch, Calfpasture River, Dowells Draft, and White Oak Draft. Photo by Lynn Cameron



The extreme terrain in so many watersheds along the route is a setting where such a massive pipeline has never been built before. The scope of the ACP project, the width and depth of excavation, and the need for additional workspace far exceeds any previous utility corridor ever constructed in Virginia. The Mountain Valley Pipeline has had dozens of erosion and sediment control violations and impacts to streams in just the first few weeks of construction.

We ask that Virginia State Water Control Board recognize that this extremely large and high impact project requires far more site-specific and detailed plans for erosion control and sedimentation for over a thousand stream crossings than what Dominion has provided. The Water Control Board and DEQ cannot defer consideration of stream crossing impacts to the inadequate requirements of the Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide 12 permit. We ask that you rescind 401 certification for the ACP.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. There is more at stake here than with any other project in Virginia's history.

Malcolm Cameron

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President

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