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Dominion sets historic Bath site mitigation plan

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Last week, Dominion Energy sent a cultural resource report containing mitigation measures for The Wilderness farm to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The farm in northern Bath County, owned by Robert and Roberta Koontz, was recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The main home is of Georgian architecture, and the farm was found eligible for its historically significant period of 1816-1967. Dominion issued a “treatment plan” for installing its proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline through the farm. The Koontzes have worked for years to protect the property, and for the last two years, the couple has fought Dominion’s plans to cross the farm with its gas transmission line. (Recorder photo by Anne Adams)

MONTEREY — On Oct. 25, proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline managing partner Dominion Energy sent a cultural resource report containing mitigation measures for The Wilderness farm to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

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Dominion explained that to analyze the impact of the ACP on the farm, computer modeling visual simulations were performed, showing seven observation points associated with the historic structures on the farm. “Each of these points will have minimal potential views to the project,” the report to FERC stated.

“Other locations within the resource boundary will have views to the project, as well. However, the project corridor cuts through the eastern section of the resource, where the view from the resource’s structures would be largely blocked by hills and wooded areas. The analysis indicates that the main house along with the associated property will experience little viewshed change as a result of the project. Further analysis indicates that most views of the project from the primary resource will be blocked by a hillside southeast of the residence.”

Dominion reported there would be no effect to the farm’s historic structures due to trees and vegetation screening the structures, though the pipeline corridor could be partially visible from the main house.

“Because the viewshed from a variety of points within the (historic) boundary will be altered as a result of the project, which bisects the Wilderness Farm property, affecting the setting of the rural landscape, the Department of Historic Resources determined there would be an adverse effect to the resource,” Dominion noted.

“The treatment plan is designed to mitigate the adverse effects of the project on the Wilderness Farm through both direct and indirect methods. This plan has been developed to support the FERC, DHR, and other consulting parties in fulfilling the conditions of the programmatic agreement for the project. All work carried out will meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Archeology and Historic Preservation and will be done by or under the supervision of an individual meeting that agency’s professional qualification standards,” Dominion said.

“In developing components of the treatment plan, several objectives were pursued. These include an interest in highlighting the NRHP significance of the resource, ensuring the public benefit of the plan, considering the needs of all stakeholders in the process, and arriving at a plan for mitigation that will enhance knowledge of the resource, and ensure its protection,” the report stated. “The treatment plan will specify the general measures that will be implemented prior to, during, and after construction; it will also include a public outreach element. Specific details on the plan’s execution will be provided once all the consulting parties have reviewed the document and the signatories have agreed to its content.”

The report outlined the treatment plan with the following components:

- Documentation — The overall setting will be documented using high-resolution panoramic photography, both before and after construction, Dominion said. The historic nomination would be “augmented” with more research to incorporate the role of slaves in the farm’s antebellum era. “Further research also may shed light on the lives of African-Americans associated with The Wilderness, both in slavery and freedom, compared to other rural blacks in Bath County,” the report said. “Archaeological studies may be a necessary component of this research. Recommendations for the need, scope, and extent of archaeological investigations will be based on the results of the research, and a management summary providing insight on how future archaeological studies could provide insight on the property will be provided.”

- Revegetation — In order to restore the property to close to its pre-construction setting, trees consistent with native vegetation currently found in the vicinity will be planted to screen the view of the permanent right-of-way, Dominion said. The goal is to more rapidly soften visual impacts, thereby reducing the effects on the property’s physical setting. The temporary construction right-of-way will be narrowed in two locations for a total distance of about 1,000 feet. The permanent right-of-way will be maintained in an herbaceous state. “While the project as a whole has a restoration and rehabilitation plan, a supplemental plan specific to the Wilderness farm was prepared,” Dominion said. “All species are native to the area. Specific details on species, care and handling, planting procedures, planting configurations, fencing, and restoration monitoring are included in the plan to ensure optimal results. The plan will be shared with the property owner for input prior to finalization.”

- Public outreach — Recognizing The Wilderness is an important part of Bath County’s history, “additional information on the property will be provided in the form of a historical narrative which can be used for an interpretive map or to augment existing websites and maps,” Dominion said. “Work already completed for the NRHP nomination will be augmented which, depending on landowner cooperation, could include a tour of the grounds as well as the interior of the primary components of the resource. As a part of this endeavor, photographic documentation using high-resolution images will be needed. Further, the information used to augment the NRHP nomination on the role enslaved African-Americans played in the operation of the farm and their lives after emancipation will be incorporated into the narrative. Related interpretive material also will be developed for installation as an exhibit at the library, local historical society, or for use in public schools, if appropriate. This installation will be professionally illustrated and will include photographs, a timeline, and historical information.”