

# The Recorder

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## Neighbors report new sinkhole near pipeline path

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BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — Northern Bath County residents reported a new sinkhole near the prospective route of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline last week.

The Virginia Department of Transportation worked quickly to fill the sinkhole, and photos were reportedly taken.

The sinkhole formed shortly after the release of a study by Dominion consultant GeoConcepts “documenting the Electrical Resistivity Imaging (ERI) surveys of the karst features identified within the construction workspace that are located within five miles of known or survey-identified bat hibernacula.”

The report concludes, “Based on the ERI data for the areas limited by this report, it is our professional opinion that the data set does not suggest that construction excavation has a likely potential to impact karst features connected to bat hibernacula and/or Madison Cave Isopod suitable habitat.”

It report said, “The interpretation is consistent with fractured and more solid bedrock. No interpreted subsurface voids are located adjacent to the surface features. The (isopod) suitable habitat does not occur in the areas that this report addresses.”

While he says he isn’t knowledgeable about the type of imaging used, cave and karst authority Rick Lambert of Monterey is familiar with the relation of karst features to aquifers that serve landowners along the proposed pipeline route. And, he observed, the report raises more concerns about water pollution than it quashes about endangered species. He hopes regulators will notice.

“I know very little about ERI,” Lambert said. “It is hard to interpret and can be misleading. From what I can understand, they found sinkholes leading to shallow water tables or shallow aquifers.

By now, all of us should know that sinkholes are injection points for water, sediments, and pollutants into the local aquifer.

“While GeoConcepts can probably say grading and trenching will most likely not harm directly any bats or their hibernacula, which was within the scope of the paper, they should be sounding the alarm that sediments and pollutants are going to go very rapidly, because the aquifers are shallow, into someone’s water. This, of course, is beyond the scope of the paper,” he said.

“In effect, these sinkholes don’t lead to bat hibernacula but they do lead to the local aquifer. GeoConcepts has removed one hurdle facing the proposed project but has discovered another one in the process. Let’s hope someone at (the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) or Department of Environmental Quality can or will read between the lines and require Dominion to go around the sinkholes and not through them,” Lambert said.