

The Recorder

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Dominion sues 4 Highland Co. landowners over survey access

January 08, 2015

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — Tuesday, county attorney Melissa Dowd informed supervisors that Dominion has filed lawsuits against four Highland County landowners who did not allow the company representatives on their property to survey for a proposed interstate natural gas transmission pipeline.

Dominion seeks declaratory judgment in the four separate lawsuits for permission to come on the properties to survey for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline that, pending federal regulatory approval, would cross Highland and carry high-pressure natural gas from West Virginia to Virginia and North Carolina.

Pendleton Goodall, Scott McClelland, Bobby J. and Jesse R. Kester, and David B. Hughes were identified as the landowners being sued in papers filed just before Christmas in the Highland Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

Clerk Lois Showalter did not know if the landowners had been served summonses yet as of Wednesday.

The landowners have 21 days to respond, Dowd said. She told supervisors the county had no legal response but she wanted them to know about the lawsuits in advance of next week's Dominion Open House, set for 5-7:30 p.m. Jan. 15 in The Highland Center.

Supervisors, who have professed a neutral position on the pipeline project, did not comment on the matter.

Dowd noted eminent domain lawyer Joe Waldo, who last month presented an informational seminar to local landowners, wanted to be in a position where Dominion sued landowners.

“So he got what he wanted,” Dowd said of Waldo.

Dowd said it was up to the four landowners to hire attorneys or represent themselves.

Dowd said Dominion additionally requested the court to provide a briefing schedule, and that probably the four would have responses filed in time for the deadline.

She pointed out Highland only has guaranteed judge appearances in circuit court on term days. The next one is in March, but a court date has been set for Jan. 31. She told supervisors she planned to listen in on the lawsuit proceedings and offered to provide copies of the lawsuits to supervisors.

In a related matter, Sheriff Tim Duff said he was informed Dominion was expecting 450 people to attend the open house and asked for a contingent of six to eight lawmen to be present. He said Dominion did not offer to pay for the expense.