



ABRA Update #294 – October 23, 2020

Issue Highlights . . .

- ABRA Embarks on Exciting New Directions
- ABRA Pursues Additional New Initiatives
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ABRA Embarks on Exciting New Directions

In August ABRA launched its new Conservation Hub, a program designed to enhance the capabilities of environmental, conservation and citizen groups to better assess the impacts of projects in the greater Allegheny-Blue Ridge region and to help assure that the overall environmental integrity of the region is maintained. The program will employ some of the same technological tools that formed the basis of the ABRA Compliance Surveillance Initiative (CSI) program that was developed to monitor construction activities of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP).

Among the expected outcomes of the Conservation Hub program include:

- Empowering stakeholders to make more informed decisions about proposed projects that impact the environment of their communities and the region.
- Improving the quality and comprehensiveness of information presented to government regulatory bodies in helping their evaluation of proposed projects and, if such projects are approved, providing ongoing monitoring information to those agencies to assist their regulatory role.
- Encouraging regulatory agencies, when evaluating whether to permit a project, to consider the cumulative impacts that the project would have on the affected region. It has been our experience from fighting the ACP project that state and federal permitting agencies are ill-equipped to evaluate the cumulative environmental impacts that projects can have.

Among the initial projects that have been undertaken as part of the Conservation Hub program, in which analytical assistance is being provided to ABRA member organizations and others, are:

- Gold mine in Buckingham County, VA – An open-pit gold mine is under consideration in Buckingham County, VA, proximate to the Union Hill community that the now-cancelled Atlantic Coast Pipeline threatened (discussed in the [October 8 ABRA Update](#)).
- Corridor H – A highway project in northern West Virginia that could threaten the ecological character of the mountains it would traverse.
- Shenandoah Mountain Proposed National Scenic Area – A proposal that will require action by Congress. It has been endorsed by the National Forest Service.
- Greenbriar Southeast – A timber harvesting project in a portion of the Monongahela National Forest located in Pocahontas County, WV.

**Vote this year as if your life depends on it.
It does!**

- Rocky Forge Wind Farm – A proposed ridge-top wind farm in Botetourt County, VA.
- Gauley Healthy Forest Restoration Project – The stated purpose of this proposed project within the Monongahela National Forest is to “the project is to improve forest stands by developing healthy stands that are more resistant to insects, disease, and fire.”
- Candy Darter – An assessment of the impact of several ongoing projects in West Virginia that would harm the habit of this recently declared endangered species.
- Shenandoah Rail Trail Partnership – Public, private, and non-profit groups in Rockingham and Shenandoah Counties, Virginia are considering converting an unused railroad into pedestrian and bike trail.

More details on these Conservation Hub projects are available on the ABRA website, [here](#).

The Conservation Hub program, with the assistance of the program’s advisory committee, is in the early stages of developing a map-based monitoring program to track proposed and ongoing projects in the three National Forests that are located within the Allegheny-Blue Ridge region (Monongahela in West Virginia and George Washington and Jefferson in Virginia). At any given time, there are several dozen ongoing projects underway or under consideration within the three National Forests. The Conservation Hub National Forest Mapping Project will provide valuable assistance to conservation groups throughout Virginia and West Virginia in keeping them apprised of these projects and their impact on the region.

For more information about the Hub program or to explore how a new project might be undertaken, contact [Dan Shaffer](#), [Ben Cunningham](#) or [Lew Freeman](#)

ABRA Pursues Additional New Initiatives

With the July 5 cancellation of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP), ABRA is focusing on several other initiatives, in addition to the new Conservation Hub program.

- ABRA’s work on the ACP will continue over the next year and beyond to assure that there is a responsible and thorough restoration of the land disturbance that occurred along the route, as well as a satisfactory resolution of outstanding easements on affected private property.
- ABRA will continue to assist our allies who are fighting the Mountain Valley Pipeline, another unneeded pipeline project that is ill-suited to being built through the Appalachian Mountains.
- The overall mission of ABRA is to protect and promote the ecological integrity of the Central Allegheny Highlands. We will continue to be vigilant for and become engaged when necessary in countering public policies or private development proposals that could negatively impact the ecology of this unique area of the Central Allegheny Highlands. This unique mountain region cannot be taken for granted.

Your Help Is Needed. Our New Initiatives Will Require Funding.

ABRA's new program directions will require new sources of funding. We welcome and encourage contributions to support our continuing work to promote and protect the ecological integrity of the Allegheny-Blue Ridge region. Tax-exempt donations may be made to ABRA, as follows:

By check: **Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, PO Box 95, Monterey, VA 24465**

By PayPal: Click [here](#). (Note: PayPal contributions are subject to a handling fee, paid by ABRA, thus reducing the amount of the contribution that is received.)

In the News:

Regional Issues

Buckingham – There's gold in them thar hills

- The Farmville Herald – 10/21/20

<https://www.farmvilleherald.com/2020/10/buckingham-theres-gold-in-them-thar-hills/>

Buckingham County Planning Commission will hold another meeting to consider amending its zoning ordinance to allow exploration activities on agricultural land via Special Use Permit, by right, or at all.

Related:

- <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2020/10/20/buckinghams-next-environmental-fight-maybe-gold-mining/>

A budget amendment is laying down the tracks for a Shenandoah Valley rail trail

- Virginia Mercury – 10/19/20

<https://www.virginiamercury.com/2020/10/19/a-budget-amendment-is-laying-down-the-tracks-for-a-shenandoah-valley-rail-trail>

What was once a longshot proposal with broad popularity is set to take its first official step towards becoming a reality.

FERC study finds no risk from protective coating of Mountain Valley Pipeline

- The Roanoke Times – 10/8/20

https://roanoke.com/news/local/ferc-study-finds-no-risk-from-protective-coating-of-mountain-valley-pipeline/article_09559b96-ae27-5f32-boee-46f69f75f47c.html

Related:

- <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/09102020/pipeline-coating-keystone-xl>

Federal court delays stream crossings for Mountain Valley Pipeline

- The Roanoke Times – 10/16/20

https://roanoke.com/news/local/federal-court-delays-stream-crossings-for-mountain-valley-pipeline/article_9c2a6ad9-1a97-521e-ad0e-4335c801061e.html#tracking-source=home-the-latest

A temporary administrative stay of stream-crossing permits was issued Friday by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Related:

- <https://www.abralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FERC-greenlights-Mountain-Valley-construction-EE-Energywire-10-13-20.pdf>

Virginia Department Of Environmental Quality Completes Environmental Justice Study

- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality – 10/16/20

<https://www.deq.virginia.gov/ConnectWithDEQ/NewsReleases/DEQCompletesEJStudy.aspx>

Related:

- <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2020/10/17/long-awaited-environmental-justice-study-calls-for-a-cultural-shift-at-deq>

Dominion offshore wind turbines complete reliability testing

- Virginia Business – 10/14/20
<https://www.virginiabusiness.com/article/dominion-offshore-wind-turbines-complete-reliability-testing/>
The project is the first offshore wind farm approved by the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and installed in federal waters, and the second offshore wind farm constructed in the United States. BOEM is expected to complete a technical review of the project by the end of the year. The turbines will continue to operate during the review process.

Inside the Utility Company Lobbying Blitz That Will Hike Electric Bills

- ProPublica -
<https://www.propublica.org/article/inside-the-utility-company-lobbying-blitz-that-will-hike-electric-bills>
Dominion still winning in Richmond.

Big Picture:

The Trump Administration Is Reversing Nearly 100 Environmental Rules. Here's the Full List.

- The New York Times – 10/15/20
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html>
Over four years in office, the Trump administration has dismantled major climate policies and rolled back many more rules governing clean air, water, wildlife and toxic chemicals.

How one obscure federal agency is clearing the path for a US carbon price

- Quartz – 10/21/20
<https://qz.com/1920177/new-ferc-policy-is-clearing-the-path-for-a-us-carbon-price/>
Related:
- <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/ferc-proposes-policy-statement-incorporation-carbon-prices-wholesale-electricity>

The number of global methane hot spots has soared this year despite the economic slowdown

- The Washington Post – 10/14/20
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/10/14/number-global-methane-hot-spots-has-soared-this-year-despite-economic-slowdown/>
The report on the jump in emissions comes shortly after the [Trump administration's easing of U.S. methane restrictions in August](#).

Trouble-plagued Pa. project sparks fear in suburbs

- E&E Energywire – 10/15/20
<https://www.abralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Trouble-plagued-Pa.-project-sparks-fear-in-suburbs-EE-Energywire-10-15-20.pdf>
Related:
- <https://www.abralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Whistleblower-alleges-safety-problems-on-Pa.-pipeline-EE-Energywire-10-16-20.pdf>

Finding the Way Forward After a Series of Setbacks

- North American Oil & Gas Pipelines – 10/16/20
<https://napipelines.com/a-new-era-of-pipeline-development-challenges/>
When it comes to large-diameter, long-distance pipeline projects, opposition groups have seemingly found the magic bullet by going after the Nationwide Permit 12. “What the environmental community has learned is they don’t have to cancel the whole pipeline, they just have to cancel a foot,” says pipeline industry veteran Joh Fluharty. “They aren’t winning. They’ve won.”

The IMF Has a Blueprint for Helping the Climate Without Hurting Economic Growth

- Bloomberg Green – 10/16/20
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-16/the-imf-has-a-blueprint-for-helping-the-climate-without-hurting-economic-growth-kgc3ogjv>
It models a package of policies it says would enable the world to get to net zero carbon emissions by mid-century.