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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

600 East Main Street, 24th Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219
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February 12, 2015

USDA Forest Service
George Washington and Jefferson National Forests
ATTN: Mountain Valley Pipeline Survey Comments
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019

Re: Mountain Valley Pipeline Survey Comments-Special Use Permit

Dear Mr. Speaks:

The Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage (DCR) has searched its Biotics Data System for occurrences of natural heritage resources from the areas outlined on the Mountain Valley Pipeline Jefferson National Forest Crossing 1 and 2 maps dated November 2014. Natural heritage resources are defined as the habitat of rare, threatened, or endangered plant and animal species, unique or exemplary natural communities, and significant geologic formations.

Giles County-Crossing 1

According to the information currently in our files, the Foster Knob Conservation Site and Laurel Branch Slopes Conservation Site are in the project vicinity. Conservation sites are tools for representing key areas of the landscape that warrant further review for possible conservation action because of the natural heritage resources and habitat they support. Conservation sites are polygons built around one or more rare plant, animal, or natural community designed to include the element and, where possible, its associated habitat, and buffer or other adjacent land thought necessary for the element's conservation. Stream Conservation Unit (SCU) identify stream reaches that contain aquatic natural heritage resources, including 2 miles upstream and 1 mile downstream of documented occurrences, and all tributaries within this reach. Conservation sites and SCUs are given a biodiversity significance ranking based on the rarity, quality, and number of element occurrences they contain; on a scale of 1-5, 1 being most significant. The Foster Knob and Laurel Branch Slopes have been given a biodiversity significance ranking of B2, which represents sites of very high significance. The natural heritage resource of concern at these sites is:

Corallorhiza bentleyi

Bentley's coralroot

G1G2/S1/NL/LE

This globally rare orchid, a member of a genus that generally lacks chlorophyll and obtains nutrients by means of a relationship between the rhizome and a fungus, was only identified as a new species and described in 1999 after being discovered at single site in West Virginia in 1996 (Freudenstein 1999, Bentley 2000). Additional occurrences were later found in western Virginia and as well as in other locations in West Virginia. It has often

been documented in disturbed roadside or trail sites or at the transition between disturbed and adjacent deciduous forest, but plants have also been found well back under the forest canopy, too. The recommended survey period for this species is during its mid-July-early August flowering period (Bentley 2000) although plants in fruit in August or later may be spotted initially and confirmed next season.

Threats to this species include road grading and maintenance activities, herbicides, and recreational trail establishment. The degree of threat from gypsy moth defoliation of the canopy species is unknown. This species is classified as endangered by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and a species of special concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), however this designation has no official legal status.

Due to the potential for this site to support populations of Bentley's coralroot, DCR recommends an inventory for this resource in the project area including where the corridor intersects the forest road. With the survey results we can more accurately evaluate potential impacts to natural heritage resources and offer specific protection recommendations for minimizing impacts to the documented resources.

Montgomery County-Crossing 2

According to the information currently in our files, Craig Creek is within the pipeline corridor, which has been designated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) as a "Threatened and Endangered Species Water". The species associated with this T & E Water is the James spinymussel (*Pleurobema collina*, G1/S1/LE/LE). DCR supports the proposed surveys for this natural heritage resource and recommends coordination with USFWS and VDGIF, Virginia's regulatory authority for the management and protection of this species to ensure compliance with the Virginia Endangered Species Act (VA ST §§ 29.1-563 – 570).

Overall Comments for Surveys Potentially Required as Identified in Table 1 of the Scoping Notice

- 1) In addition to spring and fall bat surveys, DCR recommends summer surveys be conducted for resident bats and a combination of acoustic and mist net surveys be utilized.
- 2) DCR also recommends an invasive species inventory be conducted along the proposed corridor to inform the future development of an invasive species management plan for the project.
- 3) DCR request copies of all rare, threatened and endangered species, wetland reports and invasive species inventories upon completion.
- 4) According to DCR Botanist John Townsend, there is no suitable habitat for Shale Barren Rockcress, Peter's Mountain Mallow and Northeastern Bulrush within the 300 foot corridor identified on the provided maps.

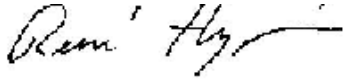
There are no State Natural Area Preserves under DCR's jurisdiction in the project vicinity.

Under a Memorandum of Agreement established between the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and the DCR, DCR represents VDACS in comments regarding potential impacts on state-listed threatened and endangered plant and insect species.

New and updated information is continually added to Biotics. Please re-submit project information and map for an update on this natural heritage information if the scope of the project changes, the pipeline alignment is modified and/or six months has passed before it is utilized.

Should you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at 804-371-2708. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Rene' Hypes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

S. Rene' Hypes
Project Review Coordinator

CC: Troy Andersen, USFWS
Ernie Aschenbach, VDGIF

Literature Cited

Bentley, S. L. 2000. Native orchids of the southern Appalachian Mountains. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill, NC. 235 pp.

Freudenstein, J. V. 1999. A new species of *Corallorhiza* (Orchidaceae) from West Virginia, U.S.A. *Novon* 9: 511–513.