



Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter

January 23, 2017

Thomas Tidwell, Forest Service Chief
Kathleen Atkinson, Eastern Region Forester
Tony Tooke, Southern Region Forester
Clyde Thompson, Monongahela National Forest Supervisor
Job Timm, George Washington National Forest Supervisor

Re: Atlantic Coast Pipeline: FERC Docket #CP15-554)

Dear Chief Tidwell, Regional Foresters Atkinson and Tooke, and Supervisors Thompson and Timm:

I am writing on behalf of Potomac Appalachian Trail Club – Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter (PATC-SSVC) to support of the Forest Service taking the time it needs to make a responsible and well-informed decision on whether to issue a Special Use Permit for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and amend the George Washington and Monongahela National Forest management plans. For this large and extremely consequential project, it is imperative that the Forest Service follow the laws and regulations in place and have access to all the information it needs to make a responsible decision.

PATC-SSVC is located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in the Harrisonburg-Staunton-Waynesboro area. Our club leads hikes and maintains trails along the 16-mile route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline through the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). We typically log 1,000-2,000 hours of volunteer work on trails in the Shenandoah Mountain area of the GWNF. Our club is opposed to the proposed ACP route, and we have been active in expressing our concerns in writing and by speaking at public meetings held by FERC.

When we hike, we enjoy scenic views, cascading mountain streams, wildflowers, birds, and geologic features, and we especially appreciate the large, unfragmented tracts of national forest on the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Mountain. These tracts of wildlands offer supreme hiking experiences for the 10 million people who live within a two-hour drive of the GWNF. The ACP route cuts through some of the premier areas of the national forest for nature study and outdoor recreation.

Our Conservation Committee has reviewed the Draft EIS for the ACP and have found it to be incomplete and very misleading. Some of the most essential information for a responsible decision is missing. We are very concerned that Dominion and FERC are pushing to expedite this consequential project without allowing enough time for all the agencies and other parties involved to gather and submit critical information for analysis and review. A project of this magnitude cannot be evaluated quickly.

As one example of misinformation, please note that the draft EIS states that the pipeline will not be visible from the proposed Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area. Our chapter has led a hike to a scenic viewpoint on Shenandoah Mountain on New Years Day of 2016 and 2017. The pipeline route would bisect the viewshed shown in the photo with a permanent utility corridor. Photo by Lynn Cameron



PATC-SSVC supports Supervisor Clyde Thompson's Dec. 13 letter stating the Forest Service does not concur with the expedited timetable set by FERC and that more time is needed. This is not just for convenience sake; more time is required by the laws and regulations the Forest Service must follow.

This pipeline is putting many fragile resources in the GWNF at risk. It is imperative that the Forest Service be given adequate time to work its way through the process carefully. Information, like Biological Surveys for sensitive species, detailed plans for high risk areas, and a more detailed engineering plan for the HDD through the Blue Ridge must be available before a decision is made, not after.

If the Forest Service is forced to fast-track this decision without critical information, the Agency will be vulnerable to objections, appeals and lawsuits.

Thank you for your responsible stewardship of our national forests, and please take the time you need to assemble and review the necessary information. It is crucial that time for public participation be taken into account during this process.

Thank you.

David Bennick

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