



For Immediate Release

Proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline seen as threat to Nelson County Water Quality

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Nelson County, Virginia – November 25, 2014 – In a county where all private water systems and most business water systems rely completely on groundwater from wells, many Nelson County residents are seriously concerned about the threat posed to the water table in Nelson by the construction of a 42-inch, high-pressure gas pipeline across their steep and forested landscape.

Nelson County businesses fear the potential of losing an asset vital to their livelihoods. Owner of Blue Mountain Brewery, Taylor Smack stated, “The clean water in this region is an integral part of the success of our brewery.”

Kathy and Martin Versluys, who have hosted travelers in Nelson County at Acorn Inn Bed and Breakfast near Nellysford for almost three decades, worry that sedimentation pollution from the construction of the pipeline will impact their property’s well and possibly cause Health Department certification complications. “Virginia’s Department of Health sets high standards for small businesses serving the public. At a minimum, Bed & Breakfast operations need annual water tests, but quarterly and monthly testing can be required,” says Kathy Versluys. “Restaurants often face more frequent testing requirements.”

Wintergreen Resort hosts thousands of visitors to the county annually and has its own water processing system, but when the views from the mountain include a 125-ft clear cut, construction easement into the horizon, Versluys imagines that visitors to the county “may be shocked at the damage to what used to be nothing short of breathtaking.”

David Holub—retired from a career in gas pipeline construction and a member of Friends of Nelson, a group organized against Dominion’s ACP proposal—describes what is in store for the county: “It’s going to be messy,” he says. “Once the trees and rocks are cleared from a typical 125 to 200 foot wide construction easement, there will be a lot of exposed earth.” Holub continues, “Pipeline companies have all the equipment needed to rip across mountains, but steep terrain

always increases the likelihood of severe erosion.”

Friends of Nelson recently contacted the EPA to strongly urge that the nation’s **Clean Water Act** be updated to state more clearly that seasonal, rain-dependent streams, plus wetlands near rivers and streams, are included in the Clean Water Act’s protection mandate.

In their comments to the EPA, Friends of Nelson stated that Nelson’s mountains, forests, streams and rivers are its most valuable resources, and that the county “is in the bulls-eye of this major industrial infrastructure project by Dominion Transmission Inc. The Atlantic Coast Pipeline would directly threaten our county’s resources.”

“The city of Richmond and three surrounding counties (Henrico, Hanover, and Chesterfield)— approximately 500,000 residents— obtain their drinking water from the James River (City of Richmond, 2008),” the group stated. “Thus, protecting the small streams that feed the James River will ultimately benefit the water quality for large numbers of people and reduce costs for water treatment.”

On October 1, 2014, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) released for public comment a “Consent Order,” revealing numerous incidents of water contamination from a newly-constructed pipeline that had been installed in terrain very similar to Nelson’s steep mountain slopes. In at least eight different locations, ground water was contaminated, according to the Consent Order. “Dominion caused conditions not allowable in waters of the state by creating sediment deposits,” the Consent Order states. The deposits were, “distinctly visible solids,” it says.

Repeated requests to Dominion from the WVDEP for information on these spills went unanswered from June 2013 to January 2014, before the corporation cooperated with the investigation, according to the Consent Order. Dominion was also cited in the Consent Order for “failure to clean up at least one spill and failure to take all measures to contain spills.” In the end, while not admitting guilt, “Dominion agreed to take all actions required by the terms of the Order.”

<http://www.dep.wv.gov/pio/Documents/Settlements%20and%20Orders/DOMINION%20TRANSMISSION%20INC.pdf>

Michael LaChance, Nelson County’s Virginia Cooperative Extension agent, offered “before-the-pipeline” well-water quality tests to Nelson County residents for a reduced fee (\$50.00 versus the standard \$300.00) on November 17, and anticipates offering a second opportunity in a few weeks. A testimony to the widespread concern of Nelson County residents, so many people showed up to purchase the water tests that supplies sold out. The next opportunity to obtain water test supplies from the Nelson County Extension office is scheduled for spring of 2015.

Nelson is particularly vulnerable to water pollution because of a weather phenomenon called

“orographic lifting,” that makes Nelson County especially prone to extreme rain events that can carry large loads of sediment into waterways. Orographic lifting is defined in Wikipedia as occurring “when an air mass is forced from a low elevation to a higher elevation, as it moves over rising terrain...which can raise the humidity to 100%... and cause, under the right conditions, precipitation.”

In 1969, Nelson County experienced this very phenomenon with tragic results. Jeffery Halverson explains accurately the weather dynamics that caused “the Mid-Atlantic’s deadliest hurricane disaster of the 20th century,” which “unfolded just 120 miles from Washington DC,” in his August 19, 2013 Washington Post article, *Unprecedented rain: Hurricane Camille’s deadly flood in the Blue Ridge mountains*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/capital-weather-gang/wp/2013/08/19/unprecedented-rain-hurricane-camilles-deadly-dlood-in-the-blue-ridge-mountains/>

Though “the Weather Bureau’s overnight forecast for Central Virginia called for ‘showers, with clearing in the morning, ...after sunset,’” Halverson describes, “a hellish rainstorm exploded over the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains, focusing down to just a pinprick on the map, centered squarely on Nelson County.”

“Only at daybreak, did those still alive realize the true horror of the night, “ says Halverson. “...Entire hillslopes liquefied... Countless trillion tons of water and soil and forest consolidated into invisible waves that effectively erased the face of Central Nelson County.”

According to numerous reports, during Hurricane Camille, at least 27 inches of rain dropped in 5-7 hours, and in many areas of the county, the land flowed like water. 153 people died in this natural disaster, and 133 bridges were washed away.

“Given the vivid and painful memory of Hurricane Camille, it’s hard for most Nelson citizens to feel anything but enormous apprehension over a 42-inch high-pressure gas pipeline running through the same real estate,” said Kathy Versluys. “What happened here in 1969 tells me that three feet of soil on top of any potentially explosive infrastructure, would not offer much protection.”

Natural gas leaks from pipelines are also a major concern for many scientists specializing in climate change. A report entitled, *America Pays for Gas Leaks*, compiled by Senator Edward Markey (D-MA), highlights this risk. “Natural gas has been touted as a cleaner alternative to coal for producing electricity, but its environmental benefits cannot be fully realized so long as distribution pipelines are leaking such enormous quantities of gas, which is primarily comprised of methane, a greenhouse [gas] that is at least 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide.” The report continues, “From 2002 to 2012, almost 800 significant incidents on gas distribution pipelines, including several hundred explosions, killed 116 people, injured 465 others, and caused more than \$800 million in property damage... The problem of leaky gas pipelines may be even worse than the data presented in this report suggests.”

http://www.markey.senate.gov/documents/markey_lost_gas_report.pdf

Further, recent studies published in the most prestigious scientific journals conclude that even if no methane leaks, switching from natural gas to coal won't reduce green house gas emissions much, if at all, because gas "is likely to displace low-carbon renewable energy sources."

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/natural-gas-offers-little-benefit-in-fight-against-global-warming/>

Friends of Nelson warns that Dominion must be watched at every stage of this pipeline process and be held to the most stringent water quality standards. Burying a high-pressure pipeline here makes no sense, the group insists.

"The geography of Nelson County is not only unsuitable, the harm it would cause to our economy and property values, and all the potential dangers, make it absolutely unacceptable," said Salidis, the group's president. "People in Nelson realize how inappropriate this route is, which is why 77% of landowners here have refused permission to survey."

"Friends of Nelson was started so that the public would have a place to go for information about the perils of putting a pipeline of this dimension through Nelson," said Joanna Salidis. "A person won't find this information on Dominion's website," she said. "FriendsofNelson.com and the Friends of Nelson Facebook page are valuable resources for the public when there are so many unanswered questions." Nelson residents who don't use the internet can sign up to receive letters via traditional mail. "We are determined to fight what we perceive to be a clear threat to the health and safety of our residents and our way of life here."

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