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### Dominion's Rush Makes Regulatory Process a Sham

Property owners in Nelson County who first heard from Dominion that they were on the route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline just last Wed., discovered Friday that they had little time to give the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission feedback. The FERC announced on Friday, Feb. 27, that they were opening the "scoping" period used to gather input about the Atlantic Coast Pipeline from the public and interested agencies and that they would hold a "scoping" meeting in Nelson county on March 18.

According to FERC's website, the scoping period is the key opportunity for property owners to ensure that potential problems with the proposed route are investigated: "Affected property owners and other stakeholders can provide detailed comments about issues pertaining to their properties. For example, stakeholders can provide information on sensitive environmental features in the project area; suggest alternatives to be evaluated; or help identify construction constraints."

Dominion's announcement of alternative routes through Nelson County doubled the people and properties affected. Newly affected property owners are struggling to understand all the implications of being on the route, and now feel even more pressured.

“This proposed route would have a very significant and detrimental impact on my family and our land. We have been in this cove for over 5 generations, and now we are expected to understand all of the implications in just a couple of weeks?” says W.M. Johnson, who received a letter requesting permission to survey last week. “We need much more time to absorb all of this.”

Friends of Nelson believes the FERC should give more time before the scoping meeting and a longer scoping period. “The meeting is the most accessible and public venue for providing input to FERC – it should be scheduled at least a month after folks receive notice they are on the route,” says Joanna Salidis, president of Friends of Nelson. “Furthermore, the scoping period itself should be 90 days, not 60, given the new additions, the length, and the complexity of the route through so much private property and pristine territory. Neither the public, nor the responsible state agencies have enough time to provide informed input.”

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources has one staff person to cover the entire region of the state west and south of Nelson. Tom Klatka is supposed to respond to property owners on the path of all the proposed pipelines in his region who believe they may have historically, archeologically, or culturally significant buildings or artifacts on their properties. On the biological side, the Virginia Natural Heritage Program staff of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation “reviews over 200 projects a month identifying potential impacts to natural heritage resources (rare animals, rare plants, exemplary natural communities and significant geologic features)” according to their website.

“These state agencies are understaffed and overworked, yet they provide most of the resources, apart from Dominion hired contractors, to assess impacts along the route of the ACP,” Salidis said. “Of course, they don’t even know what may or may not be on private property until landowners alert them.”

“The scoping period needs to be extended to 90 days or it’s just another example of the FERC’s failure to accurately assess whether the ACP is in the public’s interest or a taking for private profit.”