

NOTES ON DOMINION POWER ALTERNATE ROUTE OF PIPE LINE

The first white settlers in Nelson County were part of the migration of the Germans and Scotch-Irish down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania in the mid-eighteenth century. Later came the planters from the Tidewater. King George II issued a patent to Col. John Chiswell, a speculator, containing 2,460 acres on March 26, 1739. Soon after English settlers moved west from Tidewater. Thus began the western settlement of the state of Virginia and what was to become Henrico, then Goochland, then Albemarle, then Amherst and finally in June 1808 Nelson County. Tobacco farms and apple orchards became the livelihood of the many large plantations. Today the cultural and historic landscape of Nelson County remains much like it was during its early settlement. Vineyards have replaced the fields of tobacco and the apple orchards are making a comeback with the growing popularity of cider. But Nelson County still has much the same cultural and historic landscape that it had in the 1700's. Ed McMahon wrote in *Urban Land* " Around the world, cities are seeking the recipe for economic success in a rapidly changing global marketplace. Indispensable assets in a post-industrial economy include: well-educated people, the ability to generate new ideas and to turn those ideas into commercial realities, connectivity to global markets, and multi-modal transportation infrastructure. Another critical—but often forgotten—asset is community distinctiveness." He continues, "Place is more than just a location on a map. A sense of place is a unique collection of qualities and characteristics – visual, cultural, social, and environmental – that provide meaning to a location. Sense of place is what makes one city or town different from another, but sense of place is also what makes our physical surroundings worth caring about."

Both proposed routes for the Dominion Power gas pipeline known as the Atlantic Coast Pipeline cut through the heart of Nelson County and the "sense of place" that Ed McMahon describes above. Because of Nelson County being one of the state's poorest counties and because of the mass exit of its people during and after World War II and the lack of jobs, Nelson County did not develop like many of the other areas around the state

leaving a landscape much like it was before the two wars. By total chance, the Nelson County community was left with a beautiful rural landscape unchanged by the years. Today, after years of urban sprawl, people have discovered that they missed that unchanged landscape and they flock to visit them as a change from their hectic life styles. This is part of the economic driver that has suddenly hit Nelson County. Tourism abounds and Route 151 which runs through both proposed pipe line routes has become immensely popular with its vineyards, wineries, cideries, distilleries, farm shops, farmer's market, and artisan workshops. The popularity of hiking, biking, and being outdoors is at an all time high with visitors to the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Appalachian Trail and Wintergreen Resort – all of which the proposed gas pipelines either go through or would be a highly visual scar on their view sheds. Tourism and agriculture ARE the 21st century “industry” for Nelson County and each are growing. The proposed routes for the pipelines wind and weave through all of these economic drivers for Nelson County taking away from them the only thing they have to sell and that being a “sense of place” and a return for visitors to an unchanged landscape of their youth.

Additionally, many of the citizens of Nelson County have taken great pride in preserving this “sense of place” and over the years have either registered historic properties, put in conservation easements, or created building codes in their developments to ensure the beauty of the surroundings. While we could focus on any section of the County, we know more about the corridor of the alternative route thru the South Rockfish Valley. The following are examples of citizens learning about their community and voluntarily putting in controls in order to achieve this goal:

1. In the 1970s when the Wintergreen Resort was being developed on paper, they put codes in place as to how, where, and what was built in order to preserve the natural beauty of the land and the character of the development. They left areas open so as not to destroy the view shed of its residents. All of this is visible from the Rockfish Alley. To the north, Crawfords Knob is a 1300 acre mountain top likewise visible from the Rockfish Valley, Three Ridge Wilderness covers the mountain between the Rockfish River and Tye River along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The

alternative pipeline route originally was to run between the welcoming sign of Wintergreen and the gate house at the entrance of this successful four season resort. We have heard it may have been moved a bit away from the gate house after discussion with Dominion Power but the alternative proposed pipeline would still cross on Route 664 near Wintergreen's entrance and weave through Wintergreen's Fortunes Ridge and Fortune's Point and directly across the view shed of houses, trails and overlooks at Wintergreen. All this is part of the reason people pay to come to Wintergreen to be outdoors and to enjoy this gorgeous view.

2. In the 1980s when Horizons Village was being developed, they likewise put restrictions in place as to how, where, and what could be built in order to preserve the natural beauty of the land. No neighbor could obstruct the view of another neighbor. Two large areas were dedicated as common land in order to preserve their view shed and the natural beauty of their development. The proposed alternative route runs right through this development and its conserved land putting a scar through what they had worked so hard to preserve. It's important to realize that Nelson residents for the most part live in the valleys and the mountain side are the protected environment. Any visual pipeline corridors will not only create many environmental concerns but will greatly affect our sense of place. Except for the scars of Camille, Nelson does not have these cut thru that are so evident in other places. It must be understood that the scars from Camille on the landscape and within the memories of the community remain and always will; the scars of the pipeline are a sad reminder of that earlier tragedy in Nelson where 1% of the population died and the landscape was forever scarred. No one outside Nelson County will fully understand this once in a 1000 year event.

3. In 2007 its owners registered the old Wintergreen Country Store, circa 1903, with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VA DHR) and the National Register of Historic Resources. The property includes as a supporting structure the archeology site of the original Wintergreen Community from which Wintergreen takes its name and includes the remains of an historic grain mill, the mill race which runs from the Rockfish River to the site, and several other buildings. It is noted that there was both

legal and illegal whiskey manufacturing at the site. This site was identified by the Virginia Archeology Society in the early 1980s as significant and was studied in 2014 by Rivanna Archeology of Charlottesville for a 2016 Phase I project to be done by the Rockfish Valley Foundation. On April 11, 2015, more than 100 students from the UVA Madison House will clear the underbrush as one their service projects. The alternative proposed route would run directly through this archeological site destroying it for further interpretation of the historic Wintergreen community. While not as significant as Wingina and its native American sites this is a site of such value that it should not be ruined by a pipeline project. It might be added that this site takes its water from Spruce Creek as well as the Rockfish and the pipeline would cross RT 151 directly at the historic Spruce Creek Bridge, over 75 years old and a survivor of Camille 1969 flood.

4. In 2005 Peter and Betsy Agelasto placed conservation easements on their farm Elk Hill in order to preserve the land from being developed and marring the view along the Route 151 corridor. These easements are held by the Virginia Outdoor Foundation. In 2007 they registered their historic house Elk Hill (circa 1790-1810) and the surrounding farm with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the National Register of Historic Resources in order for it to be recognized as a Nelson County landmark. It has been farmed for over 250 years. Likewise, several years ago Mary Jane Dull created a stream restoration project and put property at her Glenthorne Farm on Glenthorne Loop into conservation easements, also protecting it from future development and preserving habitat. Her land lies adjacent to the proposed alternative route and would also be affected because of the loss of habitat surrounding it. River Bluff and Three Chimneys are also historic properties registered with the VA DHR in the immediate vicinity.

5. In 2006 a group of friends including Peter and Betsy Agelasto founded the Rockfish Valley Foundation which developed hiking and birding trails on their property at Elk Hill and also on their property at the old Wintergreen Country Store. The mission of the Rockfish Valley Foundation is to enhance the quality of life and celebrate the people, land and history of the Rockfish Valley. The trails, recognized by the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries,

became very popular and are recognized by the National Audubon Society as an important birding area in the United States. They are widely known as a major location of warbler migration viewing and raptor migration viewing. Over 300 blue bird boxes line the trails and the weekly count is done each spring from the time birds start building nests until the fledging baby blue birds leave the boxes. The trail is also registered and interactive with eBird. Birding Clubs walk the trails regularly. In May 2015 the Virginia Ornithological Society will hold its annual meeting here. The proposed alternate route runs through these trails at Spruce Creek Park at the Rockfish Valley Foundation's Natural History Center and will disturb this natural habitat for birds and for natural animal habitat crossways, the very reason that these trails were created and have been enjoyed by over 8,000 people a year.

6. In June 2012 the Rockfish Valley Foundation opened the Rockfish Valley Foundation Natural History Center which is affiliated with the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville. It is located in the historic Wintergreen Country Store. Its goal is to research the natural, cultural, and environmental history of Nelson County and to provide exhibits, programs and events to educate the citizens of and visitors to Nelson County about what makes Nelson County special. Working with professors and students from the University of Virginia, James Madison University, Sweet Briar College and others, research on the South Fork of the Rockfish Valley has been done on the geology, the cultural and historic resources, and the environment. Both the Children's Nature Trail funded by several community grants and Spruce Creek Park at the Natural History Center would be adversely affected by the proposed alternative route because of the proximity to the pipeline corridor and the destruction of habitat while it is being built and afterwards because of the continued maintenance by Dominion Power which would eliminate any future habitat in the area of the gas line easement. The alternate crosses Spruce Creek Park two times. One should be aware that construction results in compaction and the unleashing of invasive species.

7. Likewise, the Rockfish Valley Foundation created and maintains Spruce Creek Park which is the only public park in Nelson County. Spruce Creek Park includes the Children's Trail with its stations to educate children on Water, Rocks, Plants and Animals. It also includes the DGIF walking and

birding trails. Families can come to picnic, to fly kites, to play horse shoes, etc. The alternate route crosses Spruce Creek in multiple places including the walking and birding trails. In fact the pipeline crosses the site of the annual Rockfish Valley Foundation Kite Festival. 2014 was #6 and 1400 attended.

8. In 2009 the Rockfish Valley Foundation began the process to create the South Rockfish Rural Historic District and register it with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR). Liz Sargent, a cultural landscape architect, along with an intern from the University of Virginia began to inventory the historic properties in the South Rockfish. This application has been approved by the VA DHR. With funds provided by the Rockfish Valley Foundation and Nelson County, VA DHR began the next step of inventorying all historic properties in the South Rockfish. In 2014 Mary Ruffin Hanbury of Hanbury Preservation was hired to begin this documentation which will be completed by June 2015. There are 106 historic properties in this designation which include Wintergreen, Glenthorne, River Bluff, Elk Hill, Mill Hill, the Wintergreen Country Store, African American Elk Hill Baptist Church, Three Chimneys and a number of cemeteries including an African American slave cemetery still used today. The premise of this designation is that the South Rockfish was a thriving agricultural and cultural community in the 1800s with properties still standing today. The proposed alternative route crosses near most all of them and weaves in and out of the South Rockfish Rural Historic District whether on Route 151, Route 664 or on Glenthorne Loop. The very thing that the South Rockfish Rural Historic District would be recognizing with a state and national designation would be ruined by swaths of open Dominion Power easements which would destroy the very “sense of place” and the “cultural and historic” landscape that this special designation was created to recognize.

9. Because of the popularity of the vineyards, wineries, and cidery along Route 151, a few years ago a group of the businesses along Route 151 created what is called Route 151. Rack cards and blue highway signs mark Route 151 which has become a great designation and day trip for the surrounding communities, even as far away as Washington and northern

Virginia. One of the missions of Route 151 is also to help protect this heavily visited Route 151 from becoming too commercial and to be sure that it is developed keeping a “sense of place” and that new buildings are designed to maintain the character of this special place. Both proposed routes of the alternative route cross Route 151 both in the north and in the south, and both take away from the “sense of place” that these businesses have worked so hard to achieve. A visit to the region and to see the vineyards, orchards, and the process of making wine and cider is what is drawing the tourism, not the act of drinking the beer or wine which could be done anywhere. Nelson 151 opposes the intrusion of the pipelines into the landscape and an economic impact statement bears out their concerns.

10. Both Route 151 (Rockfish Valley Highway) and Route 664 (Beech Grove Road) are Virginia Scenic Byways, both proposed and designated as such to preserve the beauty of the area. Both proposed pipelines cut across these two Scenic Byways in several places. Additionally, The Rockfish Valley Foundation created a 50 mile scenic drive called the Nelson Scenic Loop www.nelsonscenicloop.com which runs from the Wintergreen Country Store on Route 151 up the Beech Grove Road, down the Blue Ridge Parkway and back via Route 56 and Route 151. Route 56 is also a scenic byway and the Blue Ridge Parkway is a national scenic byway. The alternate proposed pipeline would cross it several places.

10. The impact of the proposed pipeline on the Rockfish River watershed would be great. The bridge over Spruce Creek on Route 151 near Bold Rock Cider looks to be in its direct path. Spruce Creek, Reids Creek, and the South Rockfish River are all adopted streams with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) by the Rockfish Valley Foundation. TMDL studies and plans have been undertaken by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Several spots are currently being monitored. The watershed is sensitive; the soils are sensitive; the geology reflects concerns everyone should have about the impact of a pipeline on both. Sediment into the river will be increased by any land disturbance. From that will also come impacted soils and an explosion of invasive plants. A specific plan would be required to deal with all of this.

11. How does it affect Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail? Both were created to preserve the beauty of the land so that it could be enjoyed by all US citizens. Critical to that is to preserve the view sheds from the Blue Ridge Parkway. They both have their environmental review processes and create an EIS. Any corridor across Reid's Gap or vicinity will have a major impact on the viewshed as well as plants and animals. Reid's Gap is itself an historic place. A Reid family maintained a stable and hitched their horse to wagons to get them up the steep slopes for pay. This is repeated up and down the Blue Ridge Parkway. There is no way to camouflage these 125 foot cuts. A most popular overnight parking area for the Appalachian Trail is at Reid's Gap. It leads to popular shelters and makes for a short hike to the biggest vistas. These should not be vistas of pipeline corridors. For years that has also been a Monarch butterfly habitat – one of the few in the area – at this crossing. Lincoln Brower the world's foremost authority of the monarch lives near by and can attest to the fragility of this habitat.

As one can see, the people who live in the South Fork of the Rockfish Valley have worked hard to preserve the "sense of place" and "the character" of this area.

Much of what they have done has been done voluntarily because they believed in the importance of this mission. Their hard work has paid off as they have seen the increased tourism and agricultural economic opportunities that are growing today in Nelson County. It would be a shame if this success of the North and the South Rockfish Valley were to be jeopardized by the proposed gas pipeline weaving in and out of this area. The citizens here have worked too hard to preserve their cultural, historic, and environmental heritage to have it so easily taken away.

In the last several years land in the South Rockfish has changed hands and development such as the successful Bold Rock Cidery have been constructed. It is a multimillion dollar project and the owners have stated their intent to develop it in keeping with the beauty and historic architecture of the area. Recently another tract has changed hand with plans for an environmental lodging project. At the other end of the valley up at Reid's Gap a Bed and Breakfast is nearing completion. The owners of these properties have all stated their opposition to the pipeline and how it will impact their business. One used to say that Wintergreen produced 1/3 of the real estate taxes in Nelson County. Now one is saying that the economic engine of Route 151 produces more than Wintergreen. We refer

anyone with greater interest in the environmental impact to the list created by the Rockfish Valley Foundation and also to the economic impact statement undertaken relative to the Nelson 151 businesses and the impact of this pipeline.

This story speaks mainly about the South Rockfish Valley. It is only one of the communities of our County. Each area has its' story with similar history and similar natural resources and together they form Nelson County. These concerns exist throughout the uniqueness of Nelson County. There are many other studies on Nelson County and they should be consulted before a decision is made on a route through Nelson.