

The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

Letters

Access road for ACP would destroy property

Editor, The Recorder,

I have more very disturbing news about Dominion's proposed construction of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline on our historic property, The Wilderness.

A friend directed me to Dominion's online maps that show their access roads on private properties for construction and long-term maintenance of the proposed ACP. Some single landowners within a long stretch of the pipeline will apparently have all construction and ongoing maintenance activities for that stretch of the ACP cross their property on a Dominion access road.

I have always been concerned about Dominion's access roads and storage areas. I sent numerous requests to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission asking for the specifics about this. I have never received a response. These invasive Dominion access roads appear right now on Dominion's maps of our properties. There are many issues, risks and unknowns for landowners now and in the future with these access roads crossing our properties.

Dominion has never contacted us about anything as they essentially steal our historic property, destroy the quality of our life, destroy our property values, and destroy our precious environment. We have two conservation easements from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation that we once thought would protect our property far into the future. Perhaps VOF's shocking negotiations with Dominion for a "land swap" were delayed until September so that Dominion can make additional "land swap" offers to VOF in order to steal more easement property from landowners to build their access roads.

The Wilderness property has 1.64 miles of frontage on Deerfield Road. Yet Dominion is intentionally planning to destroy our historic entryway to the farm with their access road. In addition, Dominion has decided to run their access road only feet away from our historic home when we have 1,000 acres that could be considered for an access road.

The new proposed path of the ACP across our property will split our property in half from north to south. Now, a long Dominion access road will split our property in half from east to west. Construction and long-term usage of this access road will be a constant abomination in our lives and farming activities.

We currently have a dirt and gravel driveway with a small bridge crossing a creek in the front of our property. This tranquil entrance to The Wilderness has been the same for at least 90 years, based on old photographs of the property. Our long, winding driveway provides access to our old house and carriage house that sit on a

steep hill away from Deerfield Road. Our driveway also provides access to two large barns and two outbuildings near the house (within 100 yards) that we use regularly. After passing our home and barns, the gravel driveway ends with several dirt trails that lead to many other important areas on the farm.

Dominion plans to insert about half of their long access road just feet away from and parallel to the entire length of our driveway from Deerfield Road to just past our house. Their access road will then overlay our central trail system. These very old trails and important access paths will be wiped out by Dominion's access road.

Among other things, the Dominion access road will chop off the main entry and parking area at the front of our house. The once elegant, historic 18th century brick house sitting high on a hill will now overlook a chaotic Dominion trucking thoroughfare that will have heavy equipment and traffic 24/7 for years and years to come.

Our one-lane driveway runs very close to our house and all the surrounding home amenities. It is clear that the Dominion access road will destroy all of our outdoor amenities on one entire side of our home. The view out of all windows on this side of our home will be a direct and up-close view of the Dominion access road and 24/7 traffic. Significant beautiful green spaces and trees along our driveway will be destroyed all along the lengthy Dominion access road.

The access road will destroy our septic tank, a large fenced dog yard, the main entrance to our house, the back entrance to the carriage house and garage, covered patios along the historic brick exterior, many large trees, parking areas, an old stone wall, lush grassy areas, a two-acre fenced orchard full of mature fruit trees and an in-ground electric dog fence surrounding 20 acres, just to name a few.

The access road will encroach on the boundaries of our open spaces and fields in cultivation. The access road will dissect two large fields of orchard grass and timothy. It will destroy open spaces used for wildlife, farm vehicles, walking, cross country skiing, hiking and other recreation.

Every time we need to go to our barn, 100 yards from the house, we will be required to cross Dominion's access road with heavy and unpredictable traffic running on the road 24/7. In fact, we will be unable to leave our home site at all without crossing Dominion's access road. Visitors, farm helpers, USPS and other service providers will have to cross the access road to reach our house or barns.

The access road could damage the old stone foundation and the entire brick structure of the house and carriage house. The brick is 200-plus years old and very fragile. The material holding the brick together is constantly deteriorating. The three big brick chimneys have been repaired many times and could easily be damaged by ground movement and heavy traffic. Maintaining and repairing the old brick is very expensive and requires specialized masonry skills.

The Dominion access road is so close to the entrance to our carriage house that there will no longer be room to park a vehicle in front of it. I don't know how we can even access our carriage house garage when the access road blocks it off.

There are so many issues and unknowns with the access road Dominion plans to force on us. The Dominion access road will be a safety hazard and constantly interfere with all of our daily activities. It will be noisy and dirty. Our dogs will be tortured by unknown people coming and going around our home site. We will no longer have any privacy in and around our home. We will no longer have the peaceful environment that we enjoy today. Loss of privacy and peace in our environment is a huge issue with this access road on our property, as Dominion must know. Obviously, Dominion employees do not care about this.

Maintaining the many acres of grass and hayfields around the access road will be hazardous. Maintaining our

gravel driveway will be difficult and hazardous. Snow removal will be difficult and hazardous. Lighting along the road will disturb us and the wildlife. There will be no control of litter, garbage and materials being discarded on our property. There will be no protection for the wildlife that regularly travel across our property. Deer absolutely will be often killed or badly injured on the access road. Their poor wounded bodies will then be dumped on our property to decay. Many valuable water resources will be subject to destruction and contamination.

The Dominion access road and the ACP together will obliterate numerous gravel and dirt trails that we use regularly to access areas of the farm. There is no way we can replace what it has taken more than 200 years to build. Much of the historic footprint of the farm will be destroyed. There is no way we can be compensated for this damage and loss. Future generations can never be compensated for this loss.

We will have no control over who and what comes and goes immediately next to our home, living areas, storage facilities, recreation areas, fields, wildlife habitats, etc. Safety for ourselves, our friends, our farm helpers, our dogs, our wildlife, our personal property and our home will become a major issue over which we have no control. Barns, equipment, our gas depot and vehicles that are left unlocked today for easy use will need to be locked or stored away to prevent theft, damage and vandalism. I believe that illegal hunting and harassment of our precious wildlife will become a major issue.

We have so little traffic on our driveway and trails today that it is easy to spot uninvited vehicles and persons trespassing. With the access road, we will have no way of knowing who is on our property and what they are doing. We will not be able to stop and question anyone using the access road. The access road will allow anyone to easily trespass deep into our property and damage resources or harm wildlife. How can we be protected from the chaos and damage to our property during an emergency or disaster when the access road is heavily utilized?

We feel more threatened by crime and physical harm from having Dominion employees constantly on our property than we had in 40 years of living in major cities with very high crime rates. Our home and property will be subject to ongoing trespassing, theft, damage and vandalism. Wildlife can be easily be harassed or killed.

Based on history, there will be no fair treatment by Dominion of landowners who are forced to allow an access road on their property. We cannot rely on Dominion to be responsive and reasonable when problems arise or when we have questions. Dominion will just continue to destroy our property, bully us and ignore our issues. What then? Do we file an e-comment with FERC?

There is something important that I need to emphasize. The arrogance of Dominion employees is unparalleled from my 72 years on this earth. The obvious contempt and disrespect for landowners by Dominion employees is shocking and extremely disturbing. As just one example, I encourage everyone to view a video available on the Internet made by a Virginia landowner in the path of the ACP. The video clearly shows what transpired as Dominion employees accessed his land by court order to survey his property (with a ratio of 20-plus Dominion people and one landowner). It is chilling to see how the Dominion people behaved with arrogance, contempt and indifference toward the landowner.

And yet, I recently read a spin story from Dominion where their representative said that "Dominion has worked hard with landowners." He stated that Dominion "is listening" and "taking concrete steps to address concerns." These are exact quotes from the Dominion representative.

Apparently Dominion employees have looked at aerial views of 1,000 acres of our historic farm property and are just carving it up to suit themselves. There is complete disregard by Dominion for our rights, our livelihood, our investments in the farm, our environment, our property values, our privacy, our safety and our quality of life.

There is obviously no concern at all from Dominion for preserving our rare and historic Virginia property for future generations to enjoy as was our vision for the property. Dominion employees are clearly vindictive and want to punish those of us who are passionately trying to preserve and protect our land from them.

From more than 1.64 miles of our property's frontage on Deerfield Road, Dominion decided to build their access road where it will destroy the historic entrance to our property. The access road will also destroy many resources that are the heart of our historic property. This insidious action by Dominion smacks of arrogance, contempt, punishment and greed. It is obviously not necessary to place this access road where Dominion intends to build it. The Dominion access road is apparently intended to do the most damage possible to our property. It is yet another vindictive act against us from Dominion. Apparently Dominion is accountable to no one for their unethical actions and has FERC to support and approve whatever they intend to do.

If you, your friends and neighbors are affected by proposed path of the ACP, please review the Dominion online maps to identify the access roads as soon as possible. Express any concerns about these access roads to FERC, our elected officials and other decision makers. Let all of them know how you are being treated by Dominion. Ask FERC for details and explanations about these ACP access roads. Ask what recourse landowners have to deny Dominion's right to arbitrarily locate and build these access roads on our properties.

Please get involved with the important and complex issue of Dominion's access roads on private property right away. Keep a watchful eye on Dominion and warn your friends as a friend warned me. There is a powerful unity among those fighting the ACP, including the Bath County Board of Supervisors, The Recorder staff, and our wonderful community in Bath County. We are also fortunate to have other friends and organizations outside Bath County who are passionate about protecting our fragile and unique environment. Please be vocal and keep fighting Dominion's ACP and now, these horribly invasive and highly problematic access roads. Everyone's help to fight Dominion and the ACP is important and greatly appreciated.

Robbie Koontz
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Bath County, Va.

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