

The Cow Knob Salamander and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline



The Forest Service has determined that effects of the ACP on the Cow Knob salamander must be avoided and cannot be mitigated.



Cow Knob salamander habitat

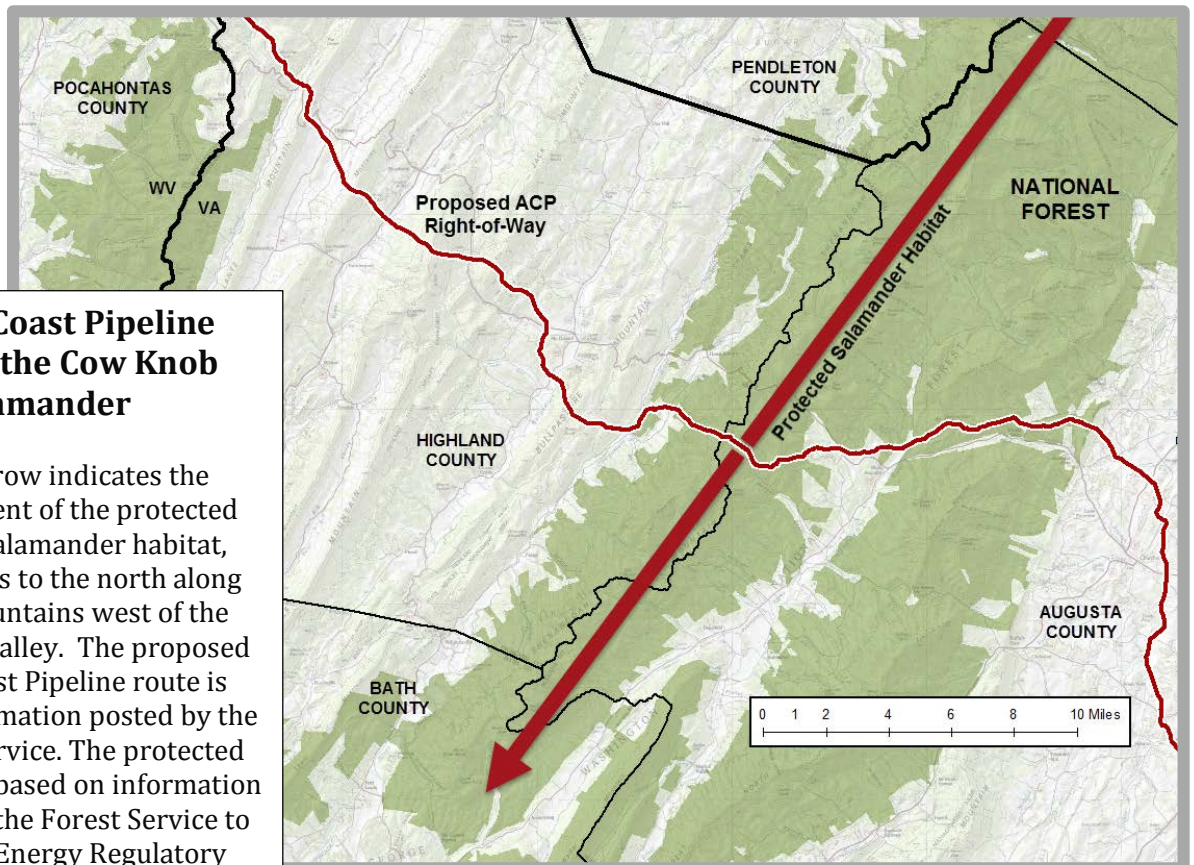
Ramsey's Draft Wilderness in the Shenandoah Mountain area along the border between Highland and Augusta Counties. The proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline would cross about one-half mile south of Signal Knob in the foreground.

The Forest Service submitted a letter to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on 9/17/15 raising significant concerns about two rare endemic salamanders in the path of the ACP.

- the Cheat Mountain salamander, associated with the remnant red spruce ecosystem in West Virginia
- the Cow Knob salamander, found only in the high mountains along the western side of the Shenandoah Valley

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has identified the Cow Knob salamander as among those species that face an extremely high risk of extinction or extirpation —due to critically low levels, immediate threats, or occurrence within an extremely limited range. The Cow Knob salamander and its habitat are protected by a 1994 Conservation Agreement between the Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The protected Cow Knob salamander habitat includes the proposed pipeline route across Shenandoah Mountain along the Augusta-Highland County border.



Atlantic Coast Pipeline threat to the Cow Knob salamander

The red arrow indicates the southern extent of the protected Cow Knob salamander habitat, which extends to the north along the high mountains west of the Shenandoah Valley. The proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline route is based on information posted by the U.S. Forest Service. The protected habitat area is based on information submitted by the Forest Service to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

*Map by Rick Webb, Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition
9/20/15*

Excerpts from information submitted to FERC by the Forest Service

“The pipeline route ACP has chosen is poor because it traverses a long ridge at higher elevations with good Cow Knob salamander habitat.”

“Pipeline construction in the present location would kill numerous Cow Knob salamanders. . . The pipeline corridor will eliminate gene flow between the north and south part of the populations. . . .”

“The Agreement states that no new rights-of-way will be permitted in Cow Knob salamander habitat and the Forest Plan states that Cow Knob salamander habitat is unsuitable for designation of new utility corridors and utility rights-of-way. . . .”

“. . . there needs to be a pipeline alternative that avoids Cow Knob salamander habitat completely. . . .”

". . . the proposed right-of-way is inconsistent with the Agreement and Assessment and the Forest Plan. The items below would correct the inconsistency.

- Select a new pipeline route. The route would have to go south of Chestnut Ridge and South Sister Knob, or North of Romney, WV.
- Bore through Shenandoah Mountain . . . It would not avoid all impacts to habitat and salamanders because it would not completely avoid salamander habitat.”

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service . . . has been petitioned to list the Cow Knob salamander under the Endangered Species Act. . . the petition has been found to be substantial and is on the review schedule for 2016, although that was prior to proposal to construct the pipeline through its habitat. The Forest not adhering to the Agreement and Assessment by allowing pipeline construction in Cow Knob salamander habitat would be an important factor when evaluating this species for federal listing.”

Click [here](#) for the 9/17/15 Forest Service submission to FERC

