

# The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

## 2015-12-17 Opinions & Commentary

[http://www.therecorderonline.com/news/2015-12-17/Opinions %20and%29 Commentary/Keep up solidarity.html](http://www.therecorderonline.com/news/2015-12-17/Opinions%20and%20Commentary/Keep%20up%20solidarity.html)

## Keep up solidarity

We've said it here many times in the last year: Making sure the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline avoids irrevocable environmental and personal property damage will take citizen involvement.

Thus far, that's been true.

Virginia residents who could be harmed by the construction of his behemoth gas transmission project have joined forces in droves, in a remarkable show of grassroots solidarity. It's impressive. And it needs to continue.

Why? For several reasons:

- Because we know the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is more apt to approve the permit for this project than not, but it seems FERC reviewers are starting to listen to those who express their concerns. Most recently, FERC told the ACP builders that it won't set a schedule for the Environmental Impact Statement process until ACP provides more information on its plans. Without citizen input and that of the U.S. Forest Service, this likely would not have happened.
- Because we know Dominion, which would build the line, has the ear of our lawmakers and our governor, but citizens and local officials are pressuring those elected officials for better oversight, and it might be working.
- Because the Department of Environmental Quality has yet to require Dominion file plans for review by independent state experts instead of reviewers hired by the company.
- Because it's crystal clear that the only folks working to get this project the scrutiny it needs are the citizens involved and affected.

Citizens have formed dozens of alliances. They have successfully pressured their local officials and planners to represent their interests with resolutions, letters and comments to FERC. They are banding together in efforts to monitor their own water quality. They are studying other pipeline projects to learn more about the dangerous effects of construction in this mountain

topography. They are reaching out to state officials, and their representatives, to engage and inform them about what this project means in Virginia. They have formed a network of scientists, attorneys, karst specialists and others who volunteer their time and expertise.

It's been astonishing to watch these citizens push endlessly and consistently to insist Dominion follow the law and regulations that are meant to protect people and the environment. The state cannot (or will not) do that adequately. We'd be better off if the General Assembly takes up requested efforts next month to put more resources toward protecting us. The situation demands it. And demand it, we must.

Our elected state leaders are supposed to give voice to their constituents, especially in ways that protect people who do not have the kind of money and power Dominion holds. We know this topic has made it onto the legislative agenda of several localities; even Highland supervisors last week asked Sen. Creigh Deeds to think about finding ways to provide better oversight for the project.

Given the widespread citizen involvement so far, there's a good chance someone is listening at the state level — someone who doesn't rely on Dominion's deep pockets. But if not, our citizens are prepared to go beyond Virginia — to the Environmental Protection Agency, as we report this week. Perhaps someone there will apply pressure from the top down to get Virginia to uphold its responsibilities for water quality.

We are reminded of Margaret Mead's well-known quote: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

This project, in all its overwhelming complexities of engineering and regulation, requires that kind of commitment from citizens if we're going to prevent harm to our water and our back yards and forests. Keep demanding Dominion live up to our standards. Dominion's standards aren't high enough.