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Dominion responds to Highland concerns

‘They don’t care at all,’ mayor says

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY – Public drinking water is not a concern unless it’s within 150 feet of the line.

Dominion essentially made that clear in reply to local governing bodies’ worries over protecting water from the Atlantic Coast Pipeline proposal — the company’s first 42-inch gas line, to cross Highland on a 550-mile path from West Virginia to Hampton Roads and North Carolina.

Dominion submitted 99 pages Tuesday responding to comments made during the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission environmental impact statement scoping period. Many of the responses were made to comments about Highland.

Dominion basically dismissed concerns expressed by county supervisors and town council that the pipeline route is located near the public water wells of Monterey and McDowell. Without identifying either governing body, Dominion said, “These commenters said that the pipeline will threaten the quality of the public water supply and that Atlantic should be required to pay for damages if the water supply is affected.

“FERC requires the applicant to identify any wells within 150 feet of construction activities. Atlantic and DTI will identify and in addition will conduct pre- and post construction testing of well quality and yields (with landowner permission) for wells within 150 feet of construction activities and perform necessary repairs or restoration to maintain well productivity and water quality,” Dominion responded. “Based on information from the Virginia Department of Health-Office of Drinking Water, no known public water supply wells are located within 150 feet of the proposed workspace for the ACP facilities in Virginia.”

Dominion said that refueling would be avoided within 100 feet of karst and 400 feet of public wells.

Mayor Rich Holman said he was not surprised. “They’re totally ignoring what’s happening underground,” Holman said of Dominion’s response. “They don’t care at all. There’s no concern about the people on their part. They don’t show us concern about what they do to destroy the underground karst structure, water or soil. They’re saying that people don’t matter all.”

Supervisors chair David Blanchard said his greatest concern was what the location of the pipeline would be. “They can say it’s not within 150 feet, but they can’t say that for sure,” he said.

Blanchard said he wanted to study Dominion’s response to FERC. “We still have concerns,” he said.

Concerns about backfill, erosion

Among the first responses in the Dominion document was to the Cowpasture River Preservation Association's question about the type of backfill would be used for the pipeline trench, including the source of backfill material and the disposal locations of excavated material taken from the pipeline trench, plus another comment that coal ash would be used to backfill the pipeline.

"The trench will be backfilled with the same material excavated from the trench," Dominion responded. "Excavated material (e.g., rock) not required for backfill will be removed and disposed of at approved upland disposal sites. Coal ash and/or coal byproduct will not be utilized as fill material for backfilling the trench."

The CRPA said the total amount of erosion and sediment from construction expected to reach the Cowpasture River should be evaluated due to the steep and rugged terrain that will be crossed by the pipeline within the Cowpasture River watershed.

Dominion said, "Atlantic and DTI will install erosion and sediment controls at water body crossings that are appropriate for the particular terrain that is being crossed, in accordance with the plan and procedures and state regulations ... During clearing, sediment barriers will be installed and maintained across the right-of-way adjacent to water bodies and within additional temporary workspace to minimize the potential for sediment runoff. Following installation of the pipeline, stream banks will be restored as near as practicable to pre-existing conditions and stabilized.

"Stabilization measures could include seeding, tree planting, installation of erosion control blankets, or installation of riprap materials, as appropriate. Temporary erosion controls will be installed immediately following bank restoration. These measures will avoid or minimize erosion and sedimentation into water bodies during construction and operation of the projects," Dominion said.

Concerning the Jackson River Preservation Association's request for a site-specific evaluation of impacts on the Back Creek and Jackson River watersheds, and a comment that the Cowpasture River should be avoided due to its high quality as a trout stream, Dominion responded the river and its tributaries are currently proposed to be crossed using the dam-and-pump method.

"While specific construction methods for Back Creek and its tributaries are still being evaluated, most water bodies with flowing water will be crossed using a dry crossing method such as flume, dam-and-pump, or cofferdam. Use of these methods will avoid or minimize in-stream impacts from sedimentation and turbidity," Dominion said.

To a comment that the preferred pipeline route in Highland County crosses the recharge area for the Cowpasture River sinking points, which feed Meadow Spring at the Coursey Springs State Fish Hatchery, and that the pipeline should be moved, Dominion said that "the proposed route ... crosses the Cowpasture River approximately 13 miles upstream from where the Coursey Springs Fish Hatchery is located along the Cowpasture River."

Sensitive areas

In response to comments that construction in the George Washington National Forest will adversely affect the James spinymussel, Dominion said surveys for the spinymussel will be conducted in water bodies with suitable

habitat in Highland, Augusta, Nelson, and Buckingham. “Potential impacts on this species, and measures for avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating impacts, will be assessed as surveys are completed,” the company said. The Nature Conservancy said the ACP should avoid three areas within the central Appalachian region: Cheat Mountain, the Laurel Fork Highlands, and the Sugarloaf Mountain/Rockfish/Shields Gap complex. Dominion responded that the proposed mainline route crosses Cheat Mountain (in Randolph County, W.Va.) “within a previously disturbed or recently replanted abandoned strip mine, which will minimize new forest clearing in this area.”

Further, the company said. “The proposed AP-1 mainline route crosses areas mapped by TNC as forest habitat in the Laurel Fork Highlands (Pocahontas County, W.Va. and Highland County, Va.), but avoids a TNC conservation easement in this area. The initial AP-1 mainline route bisected the Sugarloaf Mountain/Rockfish/Shields Gap complex (Nelson County, Virginia), but the proposed route (the East of Lovington Major Route Alternative) ... will significantly reduce the crossing length of this area.”

Sensitive sites

There were several comments explaining construction of the ACP would impact archaeological and historic sites. In particular, a number said that Nelson, Augusta, Highland, and Buckingham counties have a rich cultural heritage that will be impacted by the ACP, including Native American villages and burial sites. Dominion responded, “Atlantic is conducting archaeological and aboveground historic structures surveys along the proposed pipeline routes and in other ACP Project areas to identify sites, structures, districts, cemeteries, and other cultural resources that could be affected by construction and operation of the proposed facilities, in accordance with ... the National Historic Preservation Act.”

The status and results of these surveys to date will be discussed in upcoming reports, Dominion explained. “Atlantic intends to avoid impacts on cultural resource sites that are listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In the event that listed or eligible sites cannot be avoided, Atlantic will prepare treatment plans for these sites in consultation with FERC staff, the appropriate state agency (e.g., the Virginia Department of Historic Resources), and any consulting parties.”

Recreation, tourism, traffic

Several comments noted the outdoor recreation and tourism economy in the Appalachian region of Virginia will be negatively impacted by construction and operation of the ACP, including the Shenandoah Valley, Nelson and Highland Counties, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Dominion said construction could result in “minor, short-term impacts on users of outdoor tourist resources at locations where the proposed pipeline facilities cross or are located near recreational or special interest attractions. Impacts on tourism could result from construction activities, such as noise, or competition for housing resources, such as campgrounds, motels, and for-rent properties due to the influx of non-local workers. These impacts will be short-term, temporary, and limited to the period of construction.” The positive impact from the influx of workers on the economy will be discussed in an upcoming report, the company said.

“Short- and long-term visual impacts on recreational or special interest attractions could occur during construction and operation of the ACP ... Because of the short construction period, the projects are not expected to affect tourism industry revenues at state or local levels. The projects are not expected to affect visits to the national forests, which contain multiple and widely dispersed recreational and tourist

opportunities, or visits to the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Trail, and GDS-NWR. No impacts on tourist revenues are expected from operation of the projects.”

To the issue of construction traffic on two-lane mountain roads in Highland, Nelson, and Augusta counties will negatively impact tourism during the construction period, Dominion said that the “movement of construction equipment, materials, and personnel will cause a slight, temporary increase in traffic volumes along area roadways ... Impacts are expected to be minor and short term because construction spreads and personnel will be geographically dispersed and personnel will commute to and from work areas in early morning and late evening during non-peak traffic hours. Atlantic and DTI do not anticipate that this slight increase in traffic will impact tourism given the relatively brief construction period and alternative routes available to tourists.” The company said it is putting a plan together to “identify measures to be implemented during construction of the projects to minimize impacts on roadways and traffic. The plan will address access to construction work areas, road and railroad crossings, traffic control and mitigation, road maintenance, snow removal, and dust control.”

To comments that the ACP will adversely affect viewsheds in Highland, Augusta, and/ or Nelson Counties, the MNF and GWNF, and along the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Parkway, Dominion said it will result in short-term visual impacts during construction “as well as long-term visual impacts due to the maintained pipeline rights-of-way in forested areas.” Visual impacts, including impacts on site-specific areas, will be discussed in an upcoming report, it said.

There were comments about construction of the ACP pipeline impacting the locations and economic benefits of hunting in Nelson, Augusta, and Highland.

Dominion responded that construction may have “temporary and localized impacts on hunting due to construction noise, but no long-term or permanent impacts on hunting are anticipated.” Further, it said, the ACP “will not restrict hunting in the permanent maintained easement; however, any restrictions from the landowner that were in place prior to the ACP would still be in place.”

Concerns were expressed about Dividing Waters Farm near Hightown having a sugar maple mixed forest which creates a unique viewshed.

Dominion said it is evaluating options for avoiding or minimizing visual impacts in this area, and evaluating an alternative route in that location.

To the issue that the current pipeline route in Highland County would ruin maple syrup production by crossing a stand of existing sugar maples and disrupt the Maple Festival, Dominion said, “Atlantic and DTI are in the process of consulting with landowners to identify working sugar maple stands ... No working sugar maple stands are known to occur along the proposed pipeline routes in the rest of Virginia or in West Virginia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. If working sugar maple stands are identified along the route, Atlantic and DTI will work with landowners to avoid or minimize impacts on sugar maple production in these areas.”

One commenter said route alternatives in Hightown should be identified to avoid contaminating the Potomac River headwaters and other watersheds.

Dominion said a “blasting plan would identify blasting procedures consistent with safety requirements as defined by federal, state and local agency regulations. If blasting is necessary in a flowing water body, the use of controlled blasting techniques, where small, localized detonations are utilized, will avoid or minimize the impacts of blasting and limit rock fracture to the immediate vicinity of these activities.” After blasting, the company will remove shot rock that impedes stream flow, and discuss potential impacts in an upcoming report. “Use of the horizontal directional drill method will avoid impacts on water bodies because it allows for the pipe to be installed underneath the ground surface without disturbance of the streambed or banks. However, a temporary, localized increase in turbidity could occur in the event of an inadvertent release of drilling fluid to the water body,” it explained. “Drilling fluid to be used on the ACP will be composed of water and bentonite clay (a naturally occurring mineral). The EPA does not list bentonite as a hazardous substance. If an inadvertent return occurs in a water body, the drilling fluid will be dispersed into the water and carried downstream. No long-term adverse environmental impacts are expected should an inadvertent release occur.”

Dividing Waters Farm

To concerns that Dividing Waters Farm in Hightown could become a new state park and the area should be avoided because it is visually sensitive and historic, Dominion said again mentioned evaluating a minor route variation in an effort to avoid this property, “but the route variation provided no environmental or other advantages over the proposed route. A second route variation in this area is currently under review.” One commenter said the preferred pipeline route in Highland should be relocated to avoid the Bear Mountain and Seldom Seen faults. “Atlantic is evaluating this comment,” Dominion responded. “New route alternatives or variations may be identified as a result of this review. If new alternative routes are identified, they will be discussed in a supplemental filing.”

Karst concerns

The Virginia Cave Board suggested extra time, money, and oversight should be invested to prevent impacts on karst features within the Sinking Creek Valley, near Monterey, or the pipeline should be routed to avoid Sinking Creek Valley and Mackey Spring. The cave board also said the pipeline should be routed to avoid the Cochran’s Cave Number 2 area near mile points 135 and 136.

Dominion responded that Atlantic is conducting a karst assessment and survey to identify karst features along the proposed pipeline route. “Based on the results of the karst assessment and survey, new route alternatives or variations which avoid karst features may be identified and evaluated.”

[Dominion’s Response to Scoping Comments](#)