



File Code: 1950/2720

Date: February 29, 2016

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Forest Service is currently evaluating a special use application from Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC (Atlantic) to conduct field routing, environmental, cultural resource, geotechnical core borings, and civil surveys on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). These surveys would occur along a recently submitted 14.3 mile segment of their proposed natural gas pipeline that would cross the GWNF in Bath, Highland and Augusta counties, Virginia (see enclosed maps). The portion of the GWNF segment in the southeastern portion of Augusta County, south of Waynesboro, has not changed from the route originally filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). A temporary permit to conduct survey activities on this segment was previously issued to Atlantic and expires on April 16, 2016. Therefore, a new temporary use permit would allow for survey activities to continue on this segment.

At this time, we are seeking comments specifically related to the survey activities identified in their application to decide whether to issue a permit for these activities. Additional information may be found at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/gwj/landmanagement/projects>, under the "Atlantic Coast Pipeline" project.

BACKGROUND

Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC is a joint venture comprised of subsidiaries of Dominion Resources, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas, and AGL Resources that is proposing to construct and operate approximately 594 miles of a natural gas pipeline and associated laterals, referred to as the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP). Dominion Transmission, Inc. (Dominion) is the contractor who would build and operate the ACP on behalf of the joint venture. This interstate pipeline would deliver natural gas from supply areas in West Virginia to Virginia and North Carolina.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC has filed an application (Docket #CP15-554) with FERC under Section 7(c) of the Natural Gas Act. FERC will be the lead agency and will conduct an in-depth environmental analysis, with opportunities for public comment, prior to deciding on the need for the pipeline. If FERC would determine the pipeline is needed, the Forest Service would make a separate determination whether to issue a right-of-way permit to construct, operate and maintain a natural gas pipeline on the GWNF.

PROPOSED ACTION

Dominion is seeking a 12-month planning permit under the U.S. Forest Service's Special Use Authorization regulations (36 CFR Part 251, Subpart B) for the purpose of conducting activities such as field routing, environmental, cultural resource, geotechnical core borings, and civil surveys along a 300-foot-wide survey corridor within a 2,000-foot-wide study corridor for Study



Areas 1, 7, 8, 9, and 10 and a 300-foot-wide survey corridor within a 6,000-foot-wide study corridor for Study Areas 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 (see enclosed map). They are requesting a larger study corridor in certain study areas to provide routing flexibility due to the presence of conservation easements in the vicinity of the study areas. The surveys would be conducted by Dominion and its consultants Natural Resource Group, LLC and GAI Consultants, Inc.

The study corridors comprise approximately 7,993 acres of NFS lands. Under the 2014 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the GWNF, the study corridors occur primarily within Management Area 13-Mosaics of Habitat with smaller areas of 12D-Remote Backcountry, 7E1-Dispersed Recreation Areas, 7B-Scenic Corridors, 4D-Special Biological Areas, 2C3-Eligible Wild and Scenic River Corridor and 4A-Appalachian National Scenic Trail Corridor. The Forest Plan allows the survey activities identified below to occur within these management areas.

Routing Survey – Atlantic and its consultants will conduct an initial pedestrian reconnaissance survey to verify the alignment of the route and make minor adjustments to the proposed centerline to address engineering requirements, to provide a route that can safely be constructed, and/or to avoid sensitive resources. Where necessary, the crews will remove minor amounts of brush using hand tools to navigate the route. The crews will mark the centerline by hanging biodegradable survey ribbon from trees or other vegetation at line of site intervals and by placing temporary survey stakes at points of inflection (PI's) along the route. However, no removal of brush and no stakes will be placed within 100 feet of the Appalachian Trail crossing. The survey stakes will be removed upon completion of the surveys.

Environmental Survey – Atlantic's consultant will conduct wetland and waterbody delineation surveys within the 300-foot-wide survey corridor. To observe soil conditions, the biologists will use a 3-inch Dutch auger or tile spade to dig a soil pit to a depth of approximately 16 to 20 inches and a width of 3 to 10 inches sufficient to identify the presence or absence of hydric soil indicators and/or soil saturation. Soil pits will be dug in locations with apparent wetland characteristics (i.e., saturation, inundation, or hydrophytic vegetation), in areas adjacent to identified wetlands to confirm upland characteristics, and along the wetland boundary to verify accurate delineation of the wetland boundary. Spoil excavated from the soil pits will be replaced and packed by foot with vegetation replaced prior to leaving each sample location.

In conjunction with the wetland and waterbody delineation surveys, the biologists identify potentially suitable habitat for sensitive species, including federally listed threatened and endangered species known to occur in the vicinity of the survey corridor. No flora or fauna will be collected while conducting this survey. Biologists will also document any populations of invasive weed species that occur within the survey corridor.

Cultural Resources Survey – Atlantic's consultant will conduct a cultural resources survey to document archaeological sites and other historic resources. Fieldwork will be conducted by pedestrian reconnaissance and shovel testing within the 300-footwide survey corridor. The field methodology, data recording, and documentation efforts will meet all state and federal guidelines for Section 106 compliance, including those provided in the *Guidelines for Conducting Survey in Virginia*.

Civil Survey – Atlantic's consultant will conduct a civil survey to document the centerline and other features along the route. As the survey crews traverse the pipeline route, minor amounts of

vegetation will be brushed using hand tools to provide line of site and a travel path for survey equipment. Brush cutting will be limited to saplings or limbs less than 2 inches in diameter. PK nails with paint markings will be placed on the edges and centerlines of roadways to identify the pipeline crossing location. PIs along the planned pipeline centerline will be recorded and marked with a spike nail and whiskers or biodegradable surveyor flagging. Flagging or plastic pin flags will be left along the proposed pipeline centerline at line of sight intervals to mark the centerline for future viewing by other groups such as permitting agencies. Flagging may be placed near any identified property corners within 200 feet of the centerline.

Geotechnical Core Boring – In order to characterize subsurface conditions for slope stabilization and potential horizontal directional drilling (HDD) operations, Atlantic expects to request site-specific permission to conduct geotechnical test borings in representative areas identified during the geohazard program and potential HDD locations. These borings will be drilled with a track or wheel-mounted rotary auger drill rig (roughly the size of a one-ton pickup truck) utilizing hollow stem augers. Atlantic is currently planning the field efforts of the geohazard program to identify test bore locations within reasonable proximity to the alignment within the requested survey area and will submit locations to the GWNF prior to conducting any work. Prior to any work at an identified location, environmental surveys, including cultural resource surveys, will be conducted at each drill location.

Existing forest roads and trails will be used to the extent possible. Any bore hole locations not accessed by existing roads will be evaluated with the Forest Service. Once the boring equipment is in place, drilling operations will last approximately three days at each location, depending on the subsurface conditions encountered. Material removed from the borings will be secured and sent to a geotechnical lab for testing and classification. The resulting test bore holes will be approximately four inches in diameter and to a depth pre-determined by the geotechnical and professional engineers.

Once boring operations are complete, the bore holes will be backfilled with concrete slurry to a point approximately five feet below the surface. The remaining approximate five feet will be backfilled with native material removed during boring operations. Other cuttings from boring operations may be incorporated into the backfill mixture or removed from the site.

Access for the Surveys – No vehicles would be used except to access the corridor using public and existing Forest Roads. The surveys would be conducted on foot.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

These surveys are collectively necessary to determine the feasibility of the proposed route and collect the environmental and cultural resources data needed to make future decisions on whether or not to allow the construction and operation of the proposed gas pipeline on the GWNF. If construction is allowed, the survey information will also inform us where to avoid or reduce the impacts to sensitive resources on the GWNF.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The Forest Supervisor is the responsible official who will decide whether to issue a temporary, (one year or less) special use permit to allow the identified survey activities to occur within the identified study and survey corridors on National Forest System lands within the GWNF.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

We welcome your comments on this temporary (one year or less) use of NFS lands on the GWNF to conduct these surveys. Allowing these survey activities does not mean that we are allowing the construction of a pipeline across the GWNF. FERC is the lead agency who will prepare the environmental analysis for the construction and operation of the ACP and will provide additional opportunities to comment in the coming months. We are currently preparing a categorical exclusion (CE) for the environmental analysis for the permit, in accordance with regulations 36 CFR 220.6(e)(8), subject to public involvement and the determination that no extraordinary circumstances exist for these survey activities.

Please provide your comments by March 21, 2016. There are several options for providing comments. Hand-delivered comments must be received within our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Comments may be faxed to our office at 540-265-5145. Comments may also be mailed to our office. When sending comments through the postal system please use the following address:

USDA Forest Service
George Washington and Jefferson National Forests
ATTN: Atlantic Coast Pipeline Survey Comments
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019

Comments may also be mailed electronically to our office at: comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us. When sending electronic comments, please note the name of the project in the subject line of the electronic mailing [i.e. Atlantic Coast Pipeline Survey Comments].

More information, including detailed maps, can be found on our website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/gwj> or by calling (540) 265-5100.

Sincerely,


JOBY TIMM
Acting Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

George Washington National Forest

Pipeline Route

-  Main Line
-  Lateral
-  Study Corridor
-  George Washington National Forest
-  Study Area
-  State Boundary
-  Counties Crossed



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