USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | George Washington and Jefferson National Forests | 5162 Valleypointe Parkway Roanoke, VA 24019-3050 540/265-5100

File Code: 1950; 2720
Date: March 27, 2015

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Forest Service is currently evaluating a special use application from Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC to conduct field routing, environmental, cultural resource, and civil surveys on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). ACP has already received authorization for conducting surveys along the corridor of their proposed pipeline. The surveys proposed in this application would occur along alternative routes which cross 4.4 miles of the GWNF in Highland and Augusta Counties, Virginia (see enclosed maps).

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 551 miles of a natural gas pipeline 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 pre-filed (Docket #PF15-6) with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (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 many 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, and civil surveys along a 300-foot-wide survey corridor within a 2,000-foot-wide study corridor where the planned pipeline route crosses the GWNF. The surveys would be conducted by Dominion and its consultants, Natural Resource Group, LLS and GAI Consultants, Inc.

The 2,000-foot-wide study corridor for the alternate routes comprises approximately 1,081 acres of NFS lands. Under the 2014 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the GWNF, the study corridor occurs within the Management Areas 13-Mosaics of Habitat (774

acres, 72%), 7E1-Dispersed Recreation Areas (273 acres, 25%), and 4A-Appalachian National Scenic Trail Corridor (34 acres, 3%). The Forest Plan allows the survey activities identified below to occur within these management areas.

Routing Survey – This would be a pedestrian reconnaissance survey to address engineering requirements, provide a route that can be safely constructed, and/or avoid sensitive resources within the 2,000-foot-wide study corridor. Minor amounts of brush using hand tools could be removed for navigation of route. GPS readings, biodegradable survey ribbon and survey stakes (to be removed after all of the surveys) would be used to identify the centerline by the other survey crews.

Environmental Survey – This would include a wetland and waterbody delineation survey using visual observations of vegetation composition, hydrology and soil samples at selected locations within the 300-foot-wide survey corridor. GPS readings and ribbon would mark wetland perimeters and high water marks of waterbodies. Identification of potential suitable habitat for sensitive species, including federally listed threatened and endangered species, would be recorded with GPS readings. Invasive plant species would also be documented. No flora or fauna would be collected.

Cultural Resources Survey – This would be a pedestrian reconnaissance and shovel testing survey using field methodology, data recording and documentation in accordance with all state and federal guidelines for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act compliance within the 300-foot-wide survey corridor.

Civil Survey – This would be a recording of GPS readings of the centerline and other features along the route within 300-foot-wide survey corridor. Minor amounts of brush could be removed with hand tools to provide line of sight and a travel path for survey equipment. Brush cutting would be limited to saplings or limbs less than 2 inches in diameter. PK nails, biodegradable flagging and plastic pin flags would be used as needed.

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 alternative routes 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. 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 April 14, 2015. 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: Mountain Valley 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].

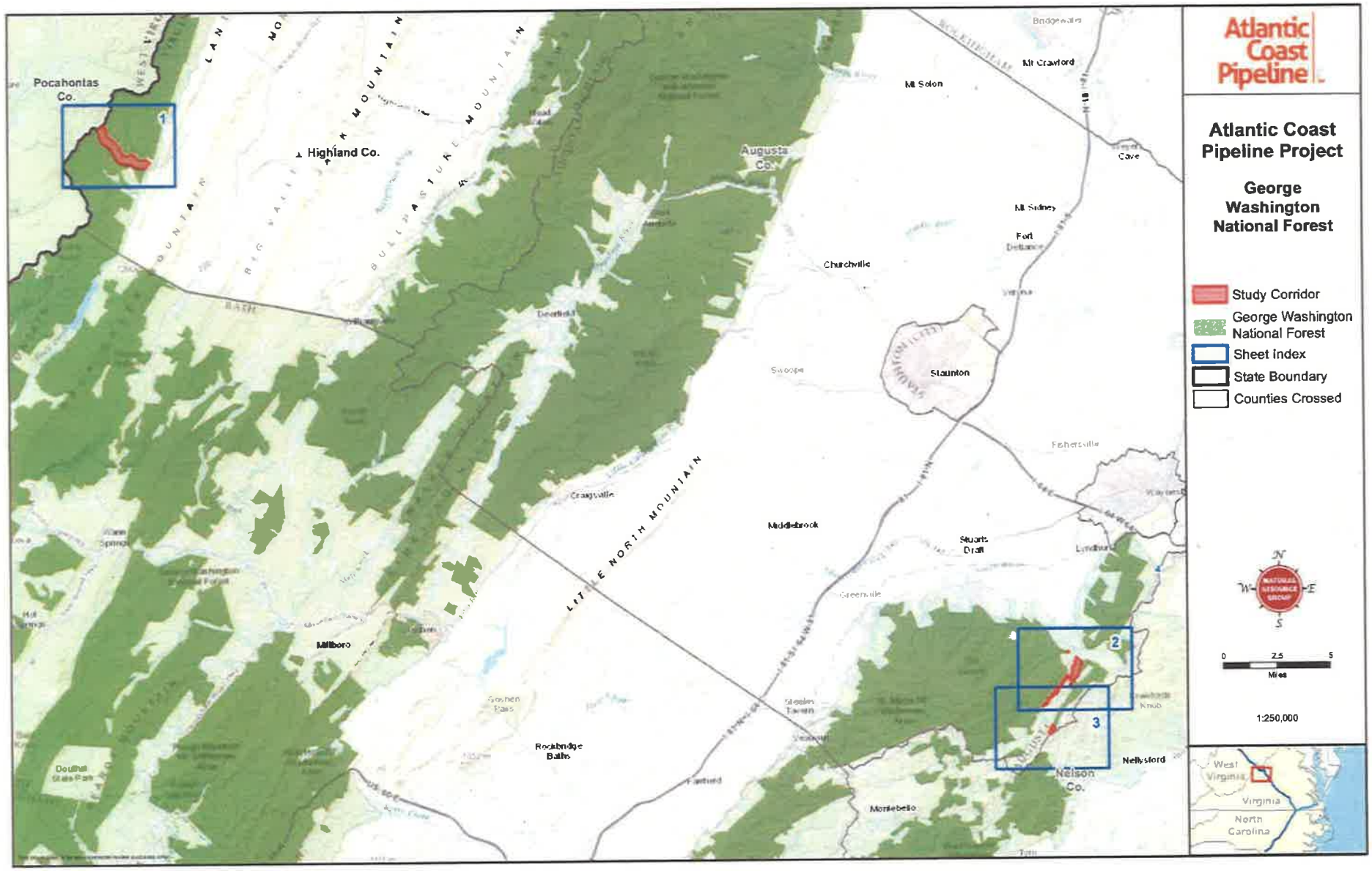
FERC is the lead agency who will prepare the environmental analysis for the construction and operation of the ACP and will provide additional opportunities to comment in the coming months. FERC is currently requesting comments on the construction and operation of the ACP as described in their Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement. They are requesting that comments be submitted to them by April 28, 2015. Information on the FERC process can be found on our website at the address in the following paragraph.

More information, including maps and specifics of survey activities can be found on our website at http://www.fs.usda.gov/gwj or by calling (540) 265-5100.

Sincerely,

H. THOMAS SPEAKS, JR.
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures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Fishersville
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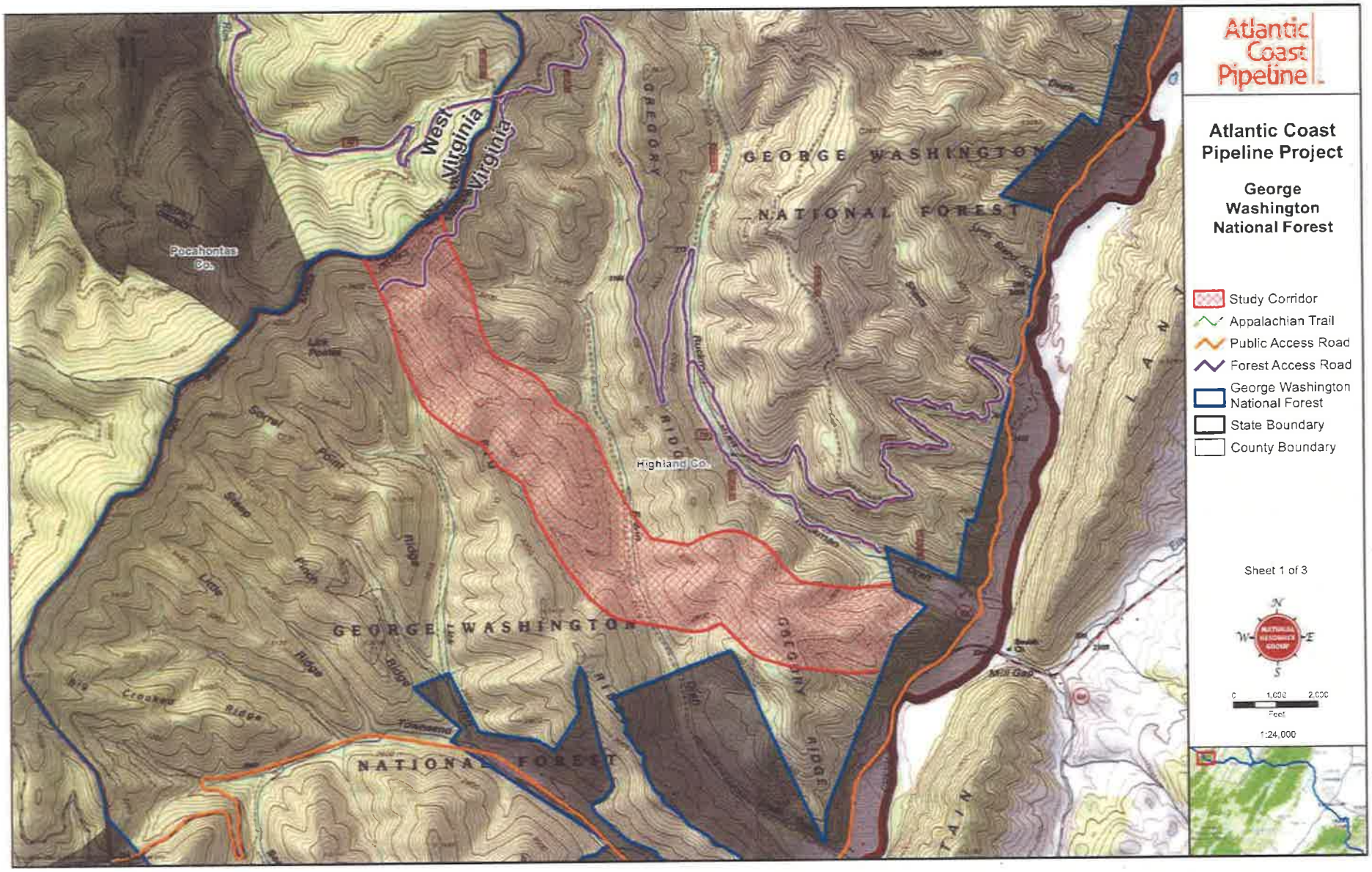
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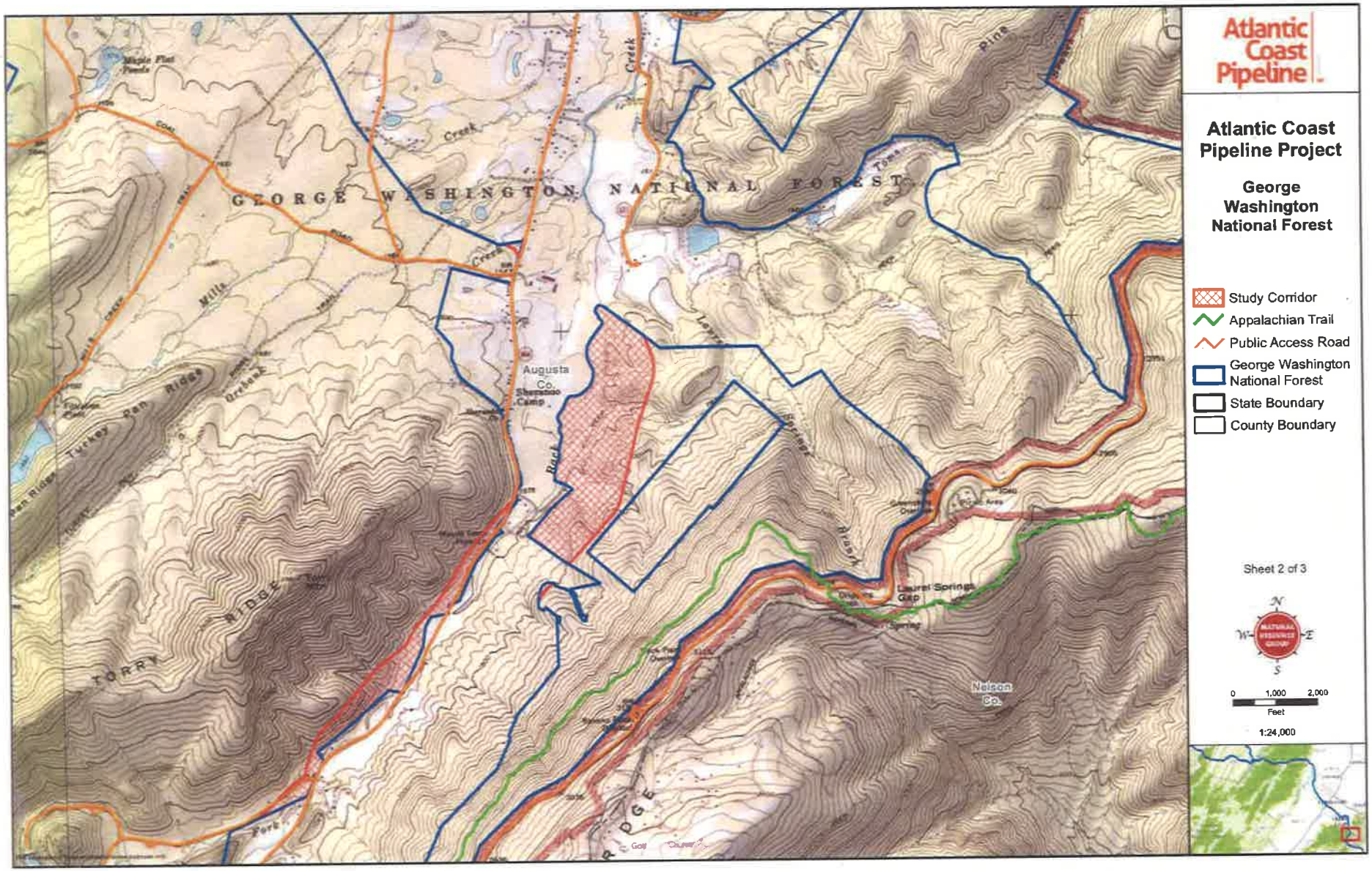
Highland Co.
GEORGE WASHINGTON NATIONAL FOREST
GREGORY RIDGE
Sorrel Point
Steep Pinch
Little Ridge
Big Crooked Ridge
Townsend
Mill Gap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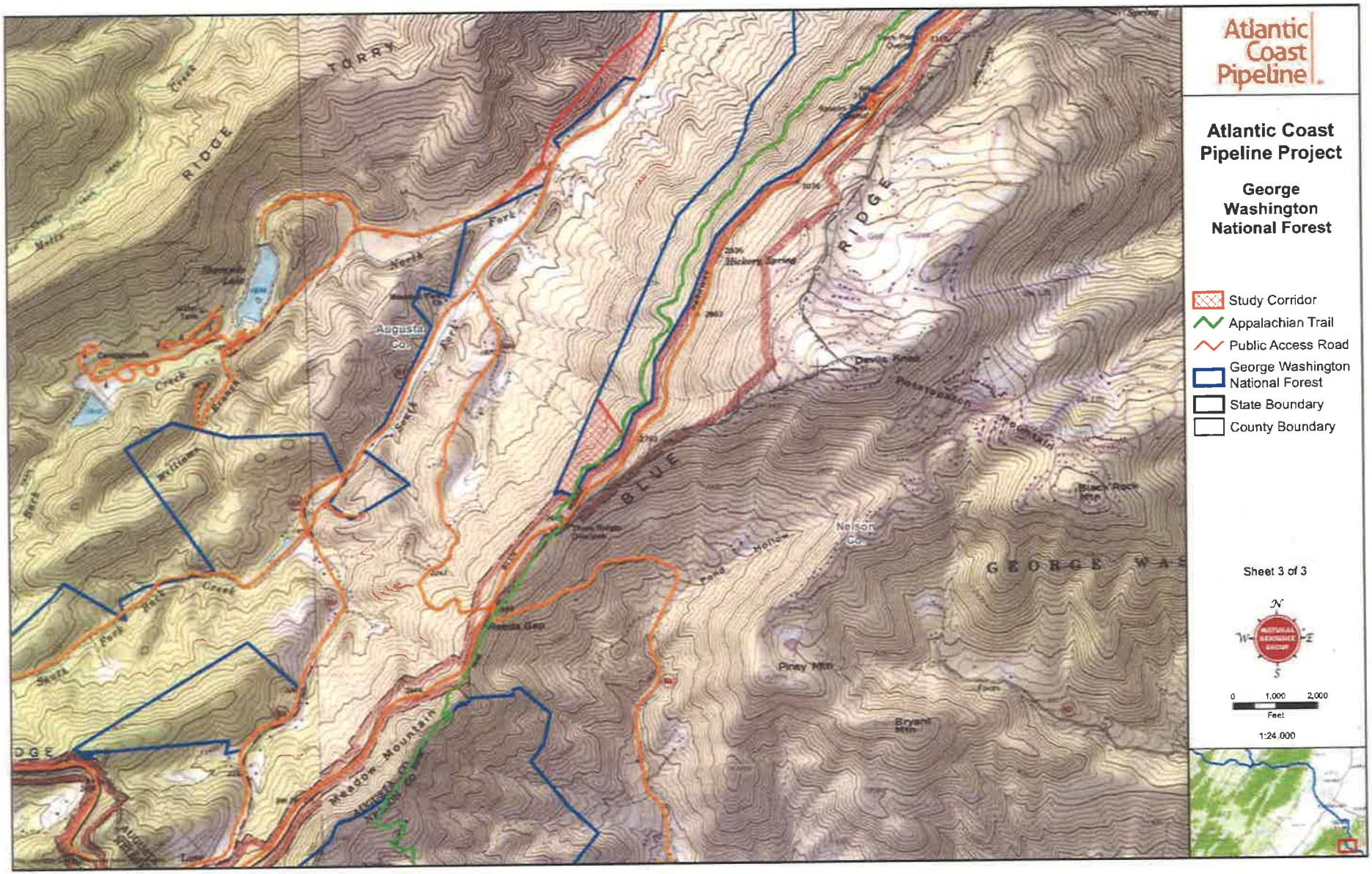
GEORGE WASHINGTON NATIONAL FOREST
Augusta Co.
Shenandoah Camp
Laurel Springs Gap
Nelson Co.
TORRY RIDGE
Turkey Run Ridge
Maple Flat Ponds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TORRY
RIDGE
BLUE
RIDGE
GEORGE WAS
Augusta Co.
Nelson Co.
Hickory Spring
Devils Knob
Black Rock Mtn
Piney Mtn
Bryant Mtn
Meadow Mountain
Reeds Gap
Pond Hollow
Williams
Creek
North Fork
South Fork
Back Creek