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## **Virginia Government Proposal for the Mountain Valley Pipeline Shifts Resource Damages, Further Endangers Wilderness**

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has collaborated with Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) proponents, by suggesting a specific change to MVP's route that would increase damages and threats to the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area. While this route change would avoid other very valuable natural areas and sensitive species, the Commonwealth's recommendation improperly implies its support of the MVP before it has been fully analyzed. "It is not the business of a Virginia resource protection agency to propose *any* route for this destructive project, especially when the new route would simply replace one type of serious damage to public and private properties with another," said Ernie Reed, President of Wild Virginia.

The Virginia DCR sent a letter dated September 9, 2016 to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), suggesting the MVP's route be moved to avoid or minimize impacts to the Slussers Chapel Conservation Site. The DCR explained that both MVP's current proposed route and a replacement loop, the Mount Tabor Alternative, "have the potential to seriously impact" natural preserves owned or managed by The Nature Conservancy, the Virginia Cave Conservancy, and others, including DCR itself. These routes would threaten caves, groundwater wells and springs, and globally-important biological communities.

David Sligh, Wild Virginia's Conservation Director stated, "of course the routes through the Slussers Chapel area are inappropriate and we praise Virginia DCR scientists for saying so. However, the DCR has now endorsed another route with huge impacts of its own. It is unacceptable that EQT, its partners, or a State agency should believe it is acceptable to trash any of these rare and amazing places for corporate profits."

The wilderness characteristics of Peter's Mountain Wilderness in Giles County in the Jefferson National Forest are already threatened by the proposed pipeline route, which would also pass near the western end of the Brush Mountain Wilderness in Montgomery County. In its recent submittal, the DCR mapped what it termed an "avoidance scenario," in which the pipeline would spare Slussers Chapel but cause much greater wilderness impacts, running along the

ridgeline of Brush Mountain and directly uphill from the Wilderness Area for more than 1.5 miles.

“To allow the company to create a 125-foot wide scar adjacent to this Wilderness area in a location that could not be hidden from or physically segregated from the Wilderness tract would be inexcusable and would destroy much of the value Congress intended to provide the American people when it created this preserve and ordered that it be protected forever,” said Ernie Reed. He continued, “digging and blasting during construction and the open corridor that would remain afterward would fragment these valuable forests, promote the proliferation of invasive plant species, and endanger water quality in streams cascading off both sides of Brush Mountain. It would also mar the wilderness value for the public, whose opportunities to experience the solitude of the forests are all too rare in Virginia.”

“Unfortunately, State agencies must feel some pressure to accommodate the wishes of the pipeline companies promoting both the MVP and ACP,” Sligh said. “When Governor McAuliffe came out in support of these projects before analyses or regulatory reviews had even begun, he created a difficult situation for his employees. Virginia regulators and scientists have the responsibility to reject pipelines if they cannot be built in a way that fully protects Virginians and our environment. Governor McAuliffe must support those officials in doing so, if a complete and fair review requires that outcome, despite his previous support for the projects.”

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