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For Immediate Release

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Wild Virginia Files Objection and Calls for Investigation of United States Forest Service on Draft Pipeline Decision

Wild Virginia, a state-wide forest conservation group, filed a formal objection today against the United States Forest Service (USFS). This was in opposition of the draft Record of Decision (ROD) that could allow the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) to be built in the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) in Virginia and in the Monongahela National Forest (MNF) in West Virginia. Joining Wild Virginia in the objection are Heartwood, the Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition and various individuals.

“By filing this formal objection to the United States Forest Service Record of Decision, Wild Virginia is doing what the Forest Service has refused to do; defend the ecological integrity of our public lands,” said Misty Boos, Wild Virginia Director.

The draft ROD proposes to allow numerous exceptions to the Land and Resource Management Plans for both national forests that could allow the ACP to cross the GWNF. The current GWNF Plan, which took 7 years to complete and had input from over 10 thousand individuals and groups, was finalized in 2014, the same year that Dominion Resources and Duke Energy rolled out plans for the ACP. Neither company participated in the planning process or offered any input to forest planners, knowing full well that their planning for the ACP, then named the “Southeast Reliability Project” were in the works.

“It is criminal that the Forest Service would bless Dominion’s proposed plans for the ACP when this should have been part of the forest planning process ten years ago,” said Ernie Reed, President of Wild Virginia and Heartwood Council member. “The Forest Service has disregarded 7 years of work and thumbed its nose at the entire forest plan to pave the way for the most damaging proposal that Virginia’s forests have ever seen.”

The ROD stands in striking opposition to virtually all the input that the USFS had submitted on environmental impacts on the forest from the proposed pipeline up to the point that the draft ROD was signed. The USFS has been perhaps the most vocal critic of the process, the content and the conclusions that Dominion has submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission as the basis for its Final Environmental Impact Statement which is a regulatory requirement for all federal projects of this nature. The Draft Record of Decision was signed July 21 by Tony Tooke, then Southern Forester in Atlanta. Virtually all of the previous submissions and comments by the USFS on the project were generated at the local level by GWNF and MNF staff.

Subsequently, one month after signing the ROD, Tooke was appointed as Chief of the United States Forest Service by Sonny Perdue, the Secretary of Agriculture.

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“For whatever reason, the Forest Service has suddenly dropped its formerly responsible approach to project review and is now proposing to authorize construction of the destructive ACP across the National Forest prior to receipt of detailed and site-specific plans,” said Rick Webb of the Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition. “The Forest Service has seemingly adopted the same deferred-analysis model of environmental review as the other dysfunctional federal and state agencies. It’s bad news for the remaining wild landscape in the central Appalachian mountain region.”

“The stark contrast of Forest Service filings before the draft Record of Decision demonstrates a breach in agency procedure which should be scrutinized by senate and congressional committees,” said David Sligh, Wild Virginia Conservation Director. “We are making this request for an investigation today to Virginia’s senatorial and congressional delegation.”

“It becomes the responsibility of citizens to hold the USFS accountable for its actions,” Boos asserted. “Wild Virginia is taking this action on their behalf.”

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