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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Forest Service Must Clarify, Limit Scope of Closure for Pipeline

On March 12, 2018, Wild Virginia wrote Jobi Timm, Forest Supervisor for the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, calling on him to clarify provisions in an Emergency Closure Order for the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP). Wild Virginia seeks assurances that any restrictions on the people's use of our public lands will be strictly limited and clearly defined.

The letter states: "We fully understand the need to enforce some requirements to protect the public and workers, if work on the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) continues, but we also feel it is vital that the public retain the right to visit and use all portions of our public lands to the greatest extent possible, consistent with safety concerns."

Supervisor Timm's [Closure Order](#), signed March 7, 2018, prohibits public entry or use in two areas of the Jefferson National Forest: 1) on two sections of road in the Forest and 2) within a zone stretching 200 feet from the center line of the right-of-way for the MVP. David Sligh, Wild Virginia's Conservation Director stated in the letter, "[o]ur primary concern about the Closure Order is with the time periods described."

The Closure Order prohibits the presence of motor vehicles "where construction associated with pipeline activity is occurring and when closed by a sign, gate, or barricade," apparently excluding the public only while active construction is taking place and warnings or barriers are in place. On the other hand, the Order fails to explicitly limit the period of closure on and adjacent to the pipeline right-of-way and does not call for signs or barricades around the affected areas.

Further, while the Order uses the word "construction," the Forest Service failed to define that term in relation to the Closure rules. Sligh said, "other state and federal agencies have created a false distinction, claiming the tree cutting now damaging our forests is not 'construction.' We need to know whether that bogus use of the term is to apply to the Forest Service's Order or not.

Wild Virginia notes in its letter: "As you know, we have grave concerns about the damages pipeline-related activities will cause on our Forest lands and we intend to document any such impacts. Proper access, without unnecessary and unwarranted limitations, will allow the public to play its proper role as safeguards of the public interest."

Wild Virginia calls on Supervisor Timm to answer our letter as soon as possible but, more importantly, to give the public clear and explicit answers to the questions we and many others have regarding our use of these treasured areas, which the Forest Service is charged with managing for the wider public benefit.