

Tom Shipley, Slaty Fork, WV.

Dear Commissioners,

I make these comments for the purpose of communicating to you circumstances that you may not be aware of as you contemplate the proposed Atlantic Coastal Pipeline application; specifically in regard to a possible alternative route MNF-5 the ACP is currently surveying for consideration.

The current ACP 'preferred' route, as stated in their first Resource Report to you, is through the northern end of Pocahontas County, West Virginia. However, MNF-5 is being surveyed as a possible alternative.

The issue with MNF-5 is that it may not solve the very issues that the ACP folks are ostensibly seeking to resolve in regards to endangered and threatened species and the concern about our forests.

The MNF-5 alternative is routed right through Sharp's Cave in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. It was named after my family and has been a draw for cavers for over a century since it was discovered. It would be a crime against nature to penetrate that structure which, in my opinion, is God's gift to us.

Sharp's Cave is over 4 1/2 miles long as far as we know. It was partially mapped by Doug Medville in the mid 1970s. It has two stories. The lower story hosts the underground flow of the Big Spring Fork of the Elk River. This underground flow upwells at the far West end of our farm in the form of a magnificent, large cold-water spring...so large that it makes a significant contribution to the creation of the Elk River on that very site.

Our community does not have a public water system. We depend on natural springs and wells...the wells often directly connected to and affected by the underground flow of the Big Spring Fork of Elk. How in the world would any engineering enable cavers (and their dollars) to keep coming to this beloved tourist destination? Sharp's Cave runs the entire length of the valley along state route 219 through which MNF-5 is drawn. To run the pipeline above ground would be an unacceptable solution as every tourist making our community a destination would be asking themselves, didn't we come here to see an unspoiled example of nature?

The impact, real or perceived, could be catastrophic for me, my family and for our community. We, too, have planted Red Spruce along the Big Spring Fork of Elk and up on the mountains. We, too, have creatures of high import in our caves and streams. On our farm, just a mile downstream from the MNF-5 route, is the wheelhouse population of the Cambarus-Elkenis, one of only two crayfish endemic to West Virginia. It is listed as Imperiled on official lists. There are two crayfish populations in West Virginia proposed to be added to the endangered species list as it stands now. Whitney Stocker, the man who co-discovered the Cambarus-Elkensis just a couple of decades ago says that this particular creature has not been studied.

This species has been assessed as Threatened by the American Fisheries Society (Taylor et al. 2007). Furthermore, it was given a heritage Global rank of G2 by NatureServe (Taylor et al. 2007, NatureServe 2009), due to existing or potential habitat destruction, modification, or reduction and this species restricted range.

The trout fishery next to our farm, where the Big Spring Fork and the Old Field Fork come together, is what is said to be one of the last places on the East Coast that has naturally reproducing Brook (our State fish), Brown and Rainbow trout. Sharp's Country Store has been in business since 1884. We have sign-in sheets that show folks coming from all over the world to fish these waters, including Scotland! They come every year. They take advantage of our accommodations, they shop in our stores.

To take the risk of interrupting Mother Nature and the very real negative economic results will be more than a burden for us. We may lose our way of life.

Our unspoiled viewsheds, heritage sites and streams are our very existence...the very basis of our economic vitality. A Mr. Bryne offered a book in 1920, Tale of the Elk. Skip Johnson, more recently, offered Upper River; Elk's Origins and Beyond. Both books chronicle the early history of the region's pioneer families (including mine) and their first hand recollections of life on the river.

Additionally, we are surrounded by National Forest Land. Although some of the land in the area is not within the National Forest official boundary, it is still the same, unspoiled forest. Many of the farms in our community have a few meadows, but are mostly forested. It would be a matter of semantics only to say MNF-5 would do less harm to environment, culture, history and livelihood. I believe ACP's own submission to you indicates that MNF-5 would be more expensive and affect more considered categories than the preferred route.

I do not know the particulars of FERC's mission statement or bylaws, but certainly it would include the responsibility to corral the various and sundry parties into a workable, practical and efficient infrastructure. As a layperson, it seems that the utility commissions require phone and cable companies to share infrastructure...one can only assume this is to prevent infrastructure from clogging up our towns, highways and countryside.

In addition to the Atlantic Coastal Pipeline, there is the Mountain Valley Pipeline and the proposed SPECTRA North Carolina and Appalachian Connector Pipelines

It seems that all four pipelines are essentially going to the going to the same place. It would be far more cost effective and environmentally responsible to require the four or more competing entities to combine forces and create one pipeline. It would be much easier for the Atlantic Coastal folks to tie in with the Spectra North Carolina folks at the northern panhandle. It would, collectively, save millions of dollars.

The thought of a large project gouging out the earth through our community, one that depends on ecology and heritage tourism for its very existence, is concerning on many levels.

Tom Shipley

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