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CENTERPIECE

Pipeline Opponents Aim To Block Dozers

Plan To Erect Sculpture In ACP Project's Path

By PETE DeLEA Daily News-Record 16 hrs ago



Sculptors Cheryl Langlais of Front Royal and Mark Schwenk of Berkeley Springs, W.Va., show off their idea for a sculpture to block the path of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Pete DeLea / DN-R

HARRISONBURG — Opponents of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline have raised their voices and put up signs in their yards.

Now, some of them plan to physically block the construction's path with an 8-foot-by-8-foot movable steel sculpture called "The Defenders."

"We want to make a strong, visual and lasting statement of resistance to the destruction that is caused by building new fossil fuel infrastructure," said Cathy Strickler, founder of the Climate Action Alliance of the Valley.

Dominion Resource's proposed \$5.1 billion pipeline would carry natural gas from near Clarksburg, W.Va., through Highland, Bath, Augusta and Nelson counties in Virginia before heading south toward North Carolina. Part of the pipeline would pass through George Washington National Forest, Churchville and south of Staunton.

The pipeline has been the subject of widespread protests in Virginia as it's gone through the regulatory and permitting process, although it has had the support of the current administration of Gov. Ralph Northam. Supporters, including Northam's Democratic predecessor Terry McAuliffe and other influential political and business leaders, say it helps meet demand for natural gas and would be an economic boon.

But opponents argue the pipeline fosters the continued use of fossil fuels, which exacerbates man-made climate change, and poses a threat to drinking water and the environment. They also say the use of eminent domain to obtain rights of way for the pipeline benefit corporations instead of the public.

CAAV members hope they can place the sculpture in the way of bulldozers as they try to clear land in the pipeline's projected path.

To move forward on the project, organizers say they must raise \$4,000 to purchase the steel. They launched a Kickstarter fundraising campaign Sunday during a meeting at Pale Fire Brewing in Harrisonburg.

Sculptors Mark Schwenk of Berkeley Springs, W.Va., and Cheryl Langlais of Front Royal plan to donate their time to build the artwork. Organizers say it will take about a month, working eight hour days, to create.

Schwenk said the piece will consist of three "defenders" standing in the front with their hands up as if they were telling construction crews to stop. There's a water element, trees and an owl to represent the life affected by the pipeline.

The sculptors volunteered to build the art at cost. Normally, they would charge roughly \$40,000.

“We want to make statement that is solid ... that’s just not hanging a paper banner with the word “stop” on it,” Schwenk said. “This will last 100 years.”

As part of the fundraising effort, Karen Ryder Lee of Bridgewater created a watercolor painting of a great gray owl. Prints will be available to those who donate.

Lee said she recently became involved in environmental causes after taking a class on climate control through James Madison University’s Lifelong Learning Institute.

“The environment is now on the top of my list,” she said.

Organizers say the sculpture also could be used in the fight against the Mountain Valley Pipeline, another natural gas pipeline that will cross through Virginia.

Plans call for the 42-inch wide, 303-mile pipe, which would be built by Mountain Valley Pipeline LLC, to carry natural gas from northwestern West Virginia to southern Virginia.

Earlier this spring, Red, 60, and Minor Terry, 30, of Bent Mountain in Roanoke County, sat in trees more than 30 feet in the air on their Bent Mountain property for more than 30 days to stop the pipeline’s construction. The pair eventually came down after a judge ruled that they would face \$1,000 daily fines paid to the pipeline’s builders if they stayed put.



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