

Report from the Conservation Committee Chairperson on the March 7 meeting of the Allegheny Blue-Ridge Alliance (ABRA)

The Virginia Native Plant Society Board of Directors voted last year to oppose the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines. Incorporated into the adopted resolution was a decision to join the [Allegheny Blue-Ridge Alliance](#), a newly developed coalition of, now 33, organizations “concerned” about the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP). On March 7 ABRA held its first meeting of representatives of those organizations to develop strategy about how to address “concerns” about ACP.

The meeting was packed with people representing organizations from around Virginia and even West Virginia, but especially those based in Highland County, Augusta County, Nelson county and a large contingent from two organizations in Buckingham County where a very large compressor station is planned for the ACP.

After hearing presentations from environmental lawyers and regulatory experts, the group broke into six working groups to discuss three topics: environmental impacts, economic impacts, and ABRA organizational strategy. Each working group presented their concluding recommendations for solutions. These were then taken into consideration during follow-on ABRA Steering Committee meetings. The result of that considerable deliberation is now available to the representative groups. For ease of reading, I have provided the key consensus recommendations adopted by the March 7th meeting below.

The steering committee is additionally working on developing an expansion of the website to provide adopted policy positions, an updated calendar of relevant events, regulatory action alerts, and mentoring opportunities by member groups and representatives. In addition, fundraising strategy is under consideration, as well as planning for the remainder of 2015 and beyond. A key issue is actively under discussion by the steering committee and will be put to a vote by member organizations in the coming months. It is as follows:

“A recommendation was made at the March 7 meeting that ABRA take a position regarding the use of existing utility corridors for any new natural gas pipelines. A subcommittee of Lew Freeman, Greg Buppert and Joe Lovett is developing a draft policy position. After the Steering Committee has agreed to a final draft policy, it will be sent to the voting representatives of ABRA member organizations for approval.”

**Summary of Consensus Points and Recommendations of March 7,
2015 ABRA Meeting**

Environment

1. Major issues are:
 - Surface water impacts – erosion and sedimentation
 - Groundwater impacts – well water
 - Pollution from construction – fly ash as backfill, wastewater from testing
 - Catastrophic failures from sinkholes, landslides
 - Habitat fragmentation
 - Endangerment of critical species

2. Strategies to be pursued:
 - Identify all permitting requirements and pressure responsible state and federal agencies to enforce regulations
 - Quantify and present impacts of ACP to FERC and other relevant agencies
 - Educate public via media on ACP impacts

Economic

1. Major issues are:
 - Cost to governments – roads, sewer, EMS, remediation of accidents/pollution
 - Property tax – truly realized tax benefits for local government
 - Property value impacts
 - Impacts on cultural and recreational attributes
(Points not reported at March 7 meeting, recommended afterwards)

2. Strategies to be pursued:
 - Make decision-making/regulatory process transparent (e.g. Pipeline Airforce)
 - Inform investment community of negative economic impacts
 - Push co-location

Organizational

1. ABRA should take a position: “oppose all new pipelines that do not use existing rights of way.”
2. Develop shared online resources for document distribution, calendar
3. Provide information on FERC process, do training sessions, mentor member organizations
4. Overall, ABRA should play a larger role in coordinating and providing communications to member organizations and reaching out to the public via media
5. Develop long-term strategy and organizational vision for ABRA – should ABRA continue beyond the ACP fight, how to fund it, apply for separate 501(c)(3) status

Other

1. Recruit experts and commission studies on environment and economic issues
2. ID decision makers, particularly those running for re-election this year