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Anti-pipeline groups sue Army Corps of Engineers over permits

By Thomas Lynn tom.lynn@gafnews.com Aug 25, 2016

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Sabal Trail readies pipeline construction

LIVE OAK — Three advocacy groups filed a federal lawsuit to block the construction of the 515-mile Florida Southeast Market Pipelines Project, which includes the Sabal Trail pipeline.

On Thursday, Aug. 17, Gulf Restoration Network (GRN), Flint Riverkeeper and the Sierra Club filed the lawsuit in the US Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals against the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) for giving three Clean Water Act permits that would allow for construction of the pipeline.

The permits allow fertile discharge of dredged materials into bodies of water, such as wetlands, while construction is going on.

Andrea Grover, director of stakeholder outreach for Sabal Trail, wrote in an email that Sabal Trail received permit approval from the ACE on Aug. 12 and authorization from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) on Aug. 18 to proceed with construction for the project.

“Sabal Trail’s construction contractors are in the processes of mobilizing to the area,” Grover wrote. “Sabal Trail has secured all the necessary easements along the pipeline route.”

According to a press release from the GRN, this pipeline would transport natural gas across 699 waterbodies, lakes, river and streams in three states: Alabama, Georgia and Florida. It will also include five compressor stations.

The three groups allege that the ACE failed to provide proper notice and public participation. The lawsuit further charges that the planned pipeline fails to avoid, minimize or mitigate the adverse environmental impacts, the release states.

In the press release Johanna DeGraffenreid with GRN said the ACE ignored 25,000 signatures opposing the pipeline.

“The public has continually been left out of the decision making process for this project,” she said in the release. “Our water and communities are too important to risk for an unnecessary pipeline.”

Chris Mericle with the WWALS Watershed Coalition said he was happy to hear that someone is finally stepping up to the plate against the pipeline.

“It’s in the hands of the lawyers now,” he said.

Recently, after many residents voiced their concerns against the pipeline at a meeting, the Suwannee River Water Management District agreed to write a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a study to be conducted on the land where the proposed pipeline will go.

There have already been a number of studies conducted on the site, including independent geological reports conducted by Dennis Price, a local geologist, and by Sabal Trail geologists.

The results that have come from these studies have caused concerns from activists. Sabal Trail’s studies show sink hole hundreds of feet away from the proposed route, while other studies show them practically on top of the route.

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