

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sioux Tribal historic preservationists conduct survey of Mountain Valley Pipeline *Survey team dodged rain, mudslides, and road closures to access archaeological sites*

ROCKY MOUNT, VA—A team consisting of seven Sioux tribal historic preservationists surveyed the Mountain Valley Pipeline project area in Franklin and Roanoke Counties, VA last week, and the data generated by their survey may be used in a legal challenge to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's process of working with Native American tribes as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The seven team members drove from their homes in the Rosebud Sioux, Cheyenne River Sioux, and Pine Ridge Sioux reservations in South Dakota to Wirtz, Virginia, where they were hosted by members of Preserve Franklin, a chapter of Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. The team walked the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) corridor on properties in Rocky Mount, Boones Mill, Callaway, and Bent Mountain where landowners had given permission for the survey.

Most of the landowners whose properties were surveyed by the Sioux preservation team have known for decades that their properties were inhabited in prehistoric times by Indian tribes, due to the presence of large numbers of arrowheads and other artifacts they have discovered and collected. Many of the landowners have been wondering whether the archaeological surveys conducted by MVP contractors were as thorough as they should be, given that the pipeline company has a vested interest in not finding significant archaeological sites.

The Sioux team's work was hampered by record-setting rainfall and resulting mudslides in areas

where the MVP construction has begun. Two of the properties which the team planned to survey on the slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Franklin County were inaccessible due road closures resulting from an inundation of mud that washed off MVP construction sites. Virginia Department of Environmental Quality subsequently called a halt to pipeline construction in those areas. Working with Bonnie Law, who is the principal organizer of the Sioux engagement in Virginia and chair of Preserve Franklin, a BREDL chapter, the team navigated alternate routes to avoid the mud-covered public roads.

Said Ann Rogers, BREDL's Section 106 Coordinator, "The team of Sioux preservationists travelled from South Dakota to southwestern Virginia to walk the MVP project area with the goal of analyzing gaps in the identification of Native American sites there requiring protection under federal law. Their findings confirm that MVP has systematically underreported the number and significance of Native American sites that will be destroyed by pipeline construction."

The work of the Sioux team was coordinated by two Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, Ben Rhodd and Steve Vance, South Dakotans who are charged by their respective tribal councils with the preservation of archaeological sites of interest to the tribes. Recent research conducted by BREDL revealed what authoritative American scholarship has known for nearly 100 years -- that Siouan tribes inhabited southwestern Virginia, and in particular the Appalachian Mountain and Piedmont region where FERC has approved pipeline construction. Said BREDL in its April 19 letter to FERC, "The decision on the part of FERC to exclude the Sioux Indian Tribes has resulted in the Commission's failure to meet requirements to identify tribes that should be consulted under Section 106."

Founded in 1984, BREDL is a regional, community-based, non-profit environmental organization whose founding principles are earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice, and community empowerment. BREDL has 72 active and 64 emeritus chapter organizations in eight states in the southeastern U.S.

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