

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

www.BREDL.org PO Box 88 Glendale Springs, North Carolina 28629 BREDL@skybest.com (336) 982-2691

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 18, 2015

Sharon Ponton | freenelson3@gmail.com | (434) 420-1874

Carolyn Reilly | carolyn@fourcornersfarm.com | (540) 488-4358

Mark Laity-Snyder | marklaitys@yahoo.com | (540)



PRESS RELEASE

Rural Citizens Join Hands to Express Solidarity and Stop the Pipeline

Local landowners and citizens of Franklin County gathered today at three significant places to join hands and participate in a nationwide action called “Hands Across Our Land.” Chanting, singing and signs drew attention to the Blackwater River location from traffic on State Road 220. Local business owner and active member of Preserve Franklin, Mike Carter, shared his concerns about the proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline and water contamination, stating: “This pipeline route is proposed to follow our watershed along the head of Teels Creek to Little Creek, joining the Blackwater River just above the town of Rocky Mount.” Carter continued, “They plan to cross the Blackwater River multiple times as well as the Pigg River, which is home to the endangered and federally protected Roanoke Log Perch. Overall, they want to cross over 100 bodies of water in Franklin County.”

After forty minutes of protesting and hand holding, the group caravanned to an overlook in the town limits of Rocky Mount. Carter, looking off into the distance, said: “This is a beautiful view of the Southern facing slopes of Cahas Mountain, before it is potentially ruined by a huge scar called the Mountain Valley Pipeline.” People took pictures of each other holding hands and another round of chanting and singing ensued. The increasingly popular “We Don’t Want Your Pipeline” song written by Robin and Linda Williams was sung, as well as other chants including, “We need jobs that’re clean and green, not a dirty pipeline, poisoning streams!”

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Preserve Franklin has addressed the Franklin County Board of Supervisors month after month since October 2014. The BOS only allows one speaker during the public comment period – one in opposition and one in support of any given topic. Despite this restriction, citizens concerned about the proposed MVP have persevered and collaborated to make sure that their concerns are clearly communicated in the short amount of time allocated.

Carolyn Reilly, a Franklin County landowner, farmer and Community Organizer with the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL), informed the BOS about the community actions which had taken place prior to attending the meeting. Reilly stated, “It is time to change your thinking - the people in YOUR community have continually reached our hands out to you, our Board of Supervisors, in effort to communicate our many, many concerns about the proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline.” She continued, “Today, we join hands to say that community is stronger than corporations! We join hands to protect our water and thousands of miles of watersheds. We join hands to show you, “the powers that be” that we're taking back our power and that **WHAT WE STAND ON IS WHAT WE STAND FOR.**”

BREDL Virginia Community Organizer and #HandsAcrossOurLand campaign coordinator, Sharon Ponton, conceived of the project to call attention to the plight of rural communities, to build solidarity and make connections. She said: "Rural America will not be a sacrifice zone for the energy industry in their attempts to put profit before people. Today, these grassroots groups and many others stood up together to protect the watersheds of millions of Americans from dangerous drilling practices, to stop their homes and families' health from being put at risk, and to loudly proclaim in unison that their land will not be stolen by the misuse of eminent domain."

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League is a 31-year old community-based, non-profit environmental organization with chapters in seven states. Our founding principles are earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice, and community empowerment. www.BREDL.org