

EPA Steps Back on Sabal Trail Concerns

[Chip Harp](#) | December 19, 2015



WWALS Watershed Coalition

EPA stepped back, while opposition ramps up against Sabal Trail fracked methane pipeline

Hahira and Albany, Georgia, December 18, 2015— (PDF) Mysteriously contradicting a substantive October letter from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 4 in Atlanta, a different EPA branch last Friday sent a brief and sketchy letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers uncritically accepting what Sabal Trail's attorney's told it, even as multiple environmental and landowner organizations filed objections with the Corps and multiple state agencies against that invading natural gas pipeline.

"I smell a skunk," said Frank Jackalone, senior organizing manager, Sierra Club of Florida.

Tim Carroll, Valdosta City Council member, said, "I don't understand how EPA and FERC can say there will not be a negative impact on our environment, aquifer, streams and rivers. A number of experts testified and spoke up saying the likelihood is very high that there could be damage to the aquifer and the environment. Why would we want to allow this to happen, to run the risk of seriously degrading one of the best water resources in the world.," Valdosta, Moultrie, and Albany, the three biggest cities along the pipeline path in Georgia, all passed resolutions against Sabal Trail, as did the counties of Terrell, Dougherty, Colquitt, Brooks, and Lowndes, in Georgia, and Hamilton and Suwannee Counties in Florida.

"The one government agency actually defending our drinking in the Floridan Aquifer and the many rivers in Georgia and Florida just stifled itself," said John S. Quarterman, President of WWALS Watershed Coalition (WWALS). WWALS advocates for the Withlacoochee River and Okapilco Creek in south Georgia and the upper Suwannee River in north Florida, all of which Sabal Trail proposed to drill

under.

Jackalone added, “This sudden, 180-degree reversal raises the question of whether the pipeline’s powerful investors pulled political strings to get EPA to back away from the objections it raised a few months ago in a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.”

That same Friday, December 11th, WWALS filed four pages of opposition with the Corps, and the Corps got a 38-page letter from Atlanta environmental law firm Greenlaw, representing the Sierra Club, the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, the Flint Riverkeeper, the Kiokee-Flint Group, Environment Florida, Our Santa Fe River Inc., Earth Ethics, Inc., Gulf Restoration Network, and the Florida Clean Water Network, incorporating by reference all previous comments or information submitted by any of those organizations or by WWALS.

Also that Friday, Judge Bram D.E. Canter ruled for Sabal Trail and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) in a case WWALS brought to stop FDEP from issuing a permit for Sabal Trail to drill under the Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers and the Suwannee River State Park. Florida law says those rivers are supposed to receive higher protection as Outstanding Florida Waters, as are state lands, as WWALS pointed out in a three-day hearing.

“I’m not sure if they read the transcript or what happened,” said Leighanne Boone, WWALS co-counsel along with William R. Wohlsifer of Tallahassee, Florida. “But I definitely felt we showed expert testimony of irreversible impacts.” Boone and Wohlsifer are already working up exceptions to file to the judge’s Order, and the WWALS board is contemplating its options for appeal.

Meanwhile in Georgia, many of the same organizations are opposing Sabal Trail’s application for an air quality permit for a compressor station in Albany from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, and provisional easements for drilling under Georgia rivers that the Georgia Department of Natural Resources board voted in September.

EPA’s about-face also happened shortly before FERC today published its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) about Sabal Trail and its two companion pipelines.

“I hope Georgia will protect the aquifer and the rivers since the feds don’t seem to be able to get their act together,” said Gordon Rogers, Flint Riverkeeper, “We don’t call it the Sinkhole Trail Pipeline for nothing; it doesn’t belong in the Floridan Aquifer.”

“We see no reason to risk local citizens’ property, or taxes, or their drinking water, or any part of the ecology for the profit of a company from some other state,” said Quarterman, “Georgia is already the fastest-growing U.S. solar market, and solar power will bring far more jobs to Georgia and Florida than any pipeline ever would, with no need for eminent domain, no risk to our water, and far faster, cheaper, and safer.”

About WWALS

WWALS Watershed Coalition (WWALS), a Waterkeeper® Alliance Affiliate and a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation established in 2012, advocates for conservation and stewardship of the Withlacoochee, Willacoochee, Alapaha, Little, and Upper Suwannee River watersheds in south Georgia and north Florida through awareness, environmental monitoring, and citizen activities. All the documents referenced are linked into this WWALS web page: <http://www.wwals.net/issues/stt/>