

Protesters arrested at Sabal Trail construction site

Saturday

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Protesters of the Sabal Trail pipeline were arrested at the Gilchrist County construction site Saturday, and opponents of the gas transmission line said protests will continue.

The Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office arrested 14 people, including one who had locked himself to a tanker truck that was delivering water needed for the construction, said Cara Jennings, a pipeline opponent.

The others who were arrested were on the roadside holding signs, she added.

Jennings said the 14 remained in the Gilchrist County Jail Saturday and will have a first appearance hearing Sunday.

"With the exception of the person who was locked to the truck, everybody else was complying with the sheriff's orders but they chose to arrest everybody," Jennings told The Sun.

"Absolutely, people are going to continue to protest. There is a call for a larger civil disobedience on Nov. 26."

Gilchrist sheriff's Chief Deputy Jeff Manning said Saturday that all of those arrested were interfering with the truck trying to get to the site.

“The protesters got in the road and stopped one of the water trucks from coming into the site. One used a bike lock and locked himself to the trailer. He didn’t have a key,” Manning said. “The protesters who were arrested either climbed onto the truck or got underneath the truck. At that point they were obstructing the truck from being able to get in.”

Manning said charges varied depending on the action of individual protesters but included trespassing and disorderly conduct.

Jennings said the arrested protesters included residents of Gilchrist and Alachua counties. Names of the protesters were not available.

The 515-mile pipeline in the past few months got the necessary permitting from federal agencies, and construction has begun in parts of Florida. It will pass through stretches of Florida, Alabama and Georgia and has generated opposition in all three states.

It is expected to pipe up to 1 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day through a dozen Florida counties and connect to another pipeline in Osceola County in the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford area.

Concern about the pipeline in North Central Florida centers on it being built under the Santa Fe River and through porous karst geology. Opponents say ruptures or leaks can harm water quality, springs and have other environmental impacts.

The protesters were arrested at the site at which the pipeline is being built under the Santa Fe River. Protesters have been there for more than a week.

In an article in the Nov. 4 Gainesville Sun, Gilchrist sheriff’s Capt. Sheryl Brown said protesting at the site is a right as long as it doesn’t interfere with the construction, impede traffic or move onto private property.

“If it becomes criminal, then we’ll get involved,” Brown said.

The permitting of the pipeline has been challenged in a lawsuit filed by the Sierra Club, the Gulf Restoration Network and Flint Riverkeeper.

