

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, and Mountain Valley Pipeline Announce Shared Commitment to Conservation Stewardship

Protecting the Appalachian Trail, Conserving Important Natural Lands, and Helping Local Recreation-based Economies

Canonsburg, PA (August 17, 2020) – The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (Conservancy), The Conservation Fund (the Fund), and Mountain Valley Pipeline, LLC (Mountain Valley), today announced a conservation stewardship agreement that will advance the Conservancy’s work to manage and protect the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (Trail), help the Fund secure additional conservation lands for public use, and enhance Trail-related community economic development. As part of the agreement, Mountain Valley has committed up to \$19.5 million for use by the Conservancy to conserve land along the Trail corridor and support outdoor recreation-based economies in Virginia and West Virginia.

“Ensuring that lands around the Appalachian Trail are conserved and connected is not only essential to protecting the most famous hiking trail in the world but also critical to preserving a wide variety of additional values,” said Laura Belleville, ATC’s Vice President of Conservation and Trail Programs. “Whether it’s conserving high-priority climate-resilient lands or safeguarding iconic vistas from the Trail, this agreement will greatly advance the pace and scale of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s mission-critical landscape conservation work. Protection of critical lands in Virginia and West Virginia will also help local recreation-based economies who rely on these lands to sustain a host of outdoor recreation activities.”

Dedicated for use in West Virginia and southwest Virginia, Mountain Valley’s voluntary commitment is the largest funding package in the Conservancy’s history to advance conservation efforts in a single geography. The funds are intended to benefit Trail users and communities in the region; conserve land with significant natural resource values, including climate resiliency; and support the outdoor recreation economies of local communities. The Conservancy, working with the Fund, will use Mountain Valley’s funding to secure a net conservation gain to the Trail, as well as to benefit the public natural resources of the region near the Trail, including the Jefferson National Forest.

“One of MVP’s primary objectives is the preservation and protection of our cultural, historical, and environmental resources and we are very pleased to be working with these two outstanding organizations,” said Diana Charletta, president and chief operating officer, EQM Midstream Partners, operator of MVP. “We understand the sensitivities that surround the blending of large-scale infrastructure projects with environmental protection and we recognize the importance of continuing to develop major energy projects in a responsible manner.”

Charletta continued: “The Conservancy’s mission to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail aligns with MVP’s desire to identify sustainable solutions that address MVP’s potential impacts and enhance conservation efforts in the region for the future. The Appalachian Trail is a national treasure and, by working together, we will provide beneficial outcomes for the region, the environment, and our communities. This agreement demonstrates that the country can continue to meet its energy needs while also providing a net benefit to the Appalachian Trail.”

More than a year ago, Mountain Valley initiated outreach to the Conservancy and the Fund, and numerous other conservation stakeholders, seeking assistance to identify and develop sustainability efforts that would complement MVP's infrastructure project. The Conservancy raised concerns about potential impacts from the project and accepted Mountain Valley's invitation to identify solutions. The outcome of these discussions empowers the Conservancy to acquire high-priority lands near the Trail in Virginia and West Virginia. These tracts will enhance the Trail hiker experience and protect views from numerous vantage points. Other protected tracts will create buffers for designated Wilderness Areas and safeguard climate resilient habitats.

"We are pleased to support the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's efforts to protect key lands along the Trail to enhance outdoor access and support the recreation-based economies of nearby communities," said Heather Richards, Virginia state director for The Conservation Fund. "We thank Mountain Valley Pipeline for its voluntary stewardship, which will advance important conservation efforts in Virginia and West Virginia."

In addition, the agreement adds significant Trail-related benefits to the array of environmental commitments Mountain Valley will implement under federal and state permits. There is no relationship between this voluntary agreement and the various federal or state permitting decisions, and Mountain Valley will continue working directly with the agencies to fully address their concerns related to the places, resources, and public values for which they are responsible. Similarly, the Conservancy will continue to engage in the federal permitting process, as it has previously done.

Recognizing the societal controversy regarding natural gas infrastructure projects, Mountain Valley is demonstrating its willingness to acknowledge its potential impacts, as well as its responsibility to be a good corporate citizen. The agreement among Mountain Valley, the Conservancy, and the Fund will result in thousands of acres protected in perpetuity, an enhanced Trail experience, and support for communities in Virginia and West Virginia.

About Appalachian Trail Conservancy

The ATC was founded in 1925 by volunteers and federal officials working to build a continuous footpath along the Appalachian Mountains. A unit of the National Park System, the A.T. ranges from Maine to Georgia and is 2,193 miles in length. It is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world. The mission of the ATC is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. For more information, please visit www.appalachiantrail.org.

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About The Conservation Fund

At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect more than eight million acres of land. Visit www.conservationfund.org.

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About Mountain Valley Pipeline

The Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) is a proposed underground, interstate natural gas pipeline system that spans approximately 303 miles from northwestern West Virginia to southern Virginia. Subject to approval and regulatory oversight by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the MVP will be constructed and owned by Mountain Valley Pipeline, LLC – a joint venture of EQM Midstream Partners, LP; NextEra Capital Holdings, Inc.; Con Edison Transmission, Inc.; WGL Midstream, Inc.; and RGC Midstream, LLC. The MVP was designed to transport clean-burning natural gas from the prolific Marcellus and Utica shale regions to the growing demand markets in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast areas of the United States. EQM Midstream Partners, primary interest owner, will operate the pipeline. From planning and development, to construction and in-service operation – MVP is dedicated to the safety of its communities, employees, and contractors; and to the preservation and protection of the environment. Visit www.mountainvalleypipeline.info

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Source: Equitrans Midstream Corporation