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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

April 2, 2021

USDA Forest Service
ATTN: Jessie Howard
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019

Re: VDOT - State Route 33 Rawley Pike Road Improvement

Dear Ms. Howard:

The Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage (DCR) has searched its Biotics Data System for occurrences of natural heritage resources from the area outlined on the submitted map. Natural heritage resources are defined as the habitat of rare, threatened, or endangered plant and animal species, unique or exemplary natural communities, and significant geologic formations.

According to the information currently in our files, the Rusty patched bumblebee (*Bombus affinis*, G1/S1/LE/NL) has been documented within a 10km radius of the project area. The rusty patched bumblebee is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) effective March 21, 2017. Since the late 1990s, the Rusty patched bumblebee has declined throughout its historical range including Virginia and is anticipated to be extinct in all ecoregions by 2030. Threats to the rusty patched bumblebee include disease, pesticides, climate change, habitat loss and small population dynamics.

The project area is within a low potential zone indicating good potential habitat for the Rusty patched bumblebee and DCR recommends an inventory for the resource in the project area. With the survey results, we can more accurately evaluate potential impacts to natural heritage resources and offer specific protection recommendations for minimizing impacts to the documented resources.

Due to the potential for this site to support populations of natural heritage resources, DCR recommends an inventory for the resource in the study area. With the survey results we can more accurately evaluate potential impacts to natural heritage resources and offer specific protection recommendations for minimizing impacts to the documented resources. DCR also recommends limiting ground disturbance as much as possible within the project area and avoidance of brush cutting along the road shoulders between May through September as summer flowering could be important to the bee if present. Due to the legal status of the Rusty patched bumblebee, DCR recommends coordination with the USFWS to ensure compliance with protected species legislation.

Under a Memorandum of Agreement established between the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and the DCR, DCR represents VDACS in comments regarding potential impacts on state-listed threatened and endangered plant and insect species.

600 East Main Street, 24th Floor | Richmond, Virginia 23219 | 804-786-6124

**State Parks • Soil and Water Conservation • Outdoor Recreation Planning
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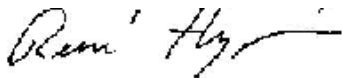
There are no State Natural Area Preserves under DCR's jurisdiction in the project vicinity.

New and updated information is continually added to Biotics. Please re-submit a completed order form and project map for an update on this natural heritage information if the scope of the project changes and/or six months has passed before it is utilized.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR) maintains a database of wildlife locations, including threatened and endangered species, trout streams, and anadromous fish waters that may contain information not documented in this letter. Their database may be accessed from <http://vafwis.org/fwis/> or contact Ernie Aschenbach at 804-367-2733 or Ernie.Aschenbach@dwr.virginia.gov.

Should you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at 804-371-2708. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "René Hypes", with a stylized flourish at the end.

S. René Hypes
Natural Heritage Project Review Coordinator

Cc: Troy Andersen, USFWS