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First name: Kimberley
Last name: Homer
Organization:
Title:
Comments: To: Dr. Homer Wilkes, Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture, George Washington & Jefferson National Forests
Dear Dr. Wilkes,
My daughter Gwyneth and I spend time in the Jefferson National Forest every week. If you haven't been here, please come and see for yourself. It is more sacred than any cathedral. I've attached a picture of one of the streams we cross. Sometimes the water is pouring over the rocks, and sometimes the stream bed is dry, and this is not always correlated with the rainfall measured on the other side of the mountain in Blacksburg. We have noticed that while the annual rainfall is about the same, the intensity of rain-having an inch or more of rain per event-has increased dramatically in the last two decades, and this intensity drives runoff. I do hope your EIS takes increasing rainfall intensity into account. The area of the forest we most often walk in has a variety of trees, shrubs, mosses, and fungi, and these keep the stream banks from eroding, though farther downstream, the well-trodden trails do push sediment into the stream. The Jefferson National Forest is an important source of recreation and rejuvenation for locals and visitors alike, and also a vital watershed, with its springs and streams flowing into the New and Roanoke Rivers, which provide drinking water for millions. The JNF is also home to many birds, plants, and animals, some already endangered, and some a source of food to deer hunters and fungi foragers. There is a water impoundment built by beavers on a section of Poverty Creek, and far from being destructive, the beavers took only the small trees they needed, and left ample space in their dam for the fish to get through. If Equitrans had shown anywhere near the care the beavers have, I would not be so terrified about their project, but they have demonstrated time and again that they do not care about the land, water, or the people and animals who live along their route. This past November, a leak at an Equitrans storage facility in Pennsylvania spewed 100 million cubic feet of methane into the atmosphere per day for eleven days before Equitrans took action to stop the leak, and they barred the emergency response team from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection from accessing the site. A written statement provided by Equitrans spokeswoman Natalie Cox said "there are no immediate public safety concerns" and the company has been working with a specialty well services company to plug the leak. Cox cautioned the estimate of 100 million cubic feet of natural gas leaking per day is preliminary and the company would be unable to provide an accurate account of the gas lost until an inventory verification study is completed. That single Equitrans release effectively erased emissions gains from about half of the 656,000 electric vehicles sold in the US last year.
I've read the comments both for and against the proposal to gut forest protections for the sake of this one company's profits. The "for" comments come from Chambers of Commerce in West Virginia and Virginia, certainly not known for supporting worker safety or public health, and perpetuate the fiction that methane is safe. This pipeline will not create new local jobs, but it has and will harm people who work in farming and natural resources. Further, fracking, storing, and compressing gas require energy sources that are not gas-diesel engines to drill, grade, and haul cement and sand, and electricity to run compressors-and as these costs rise, the energy return on investment falls. The worst and likely outcome is that we will destroy our forest for a boondoggle company that will declare bankruptcy and fail to clean up their mess. We are going to need pumps and pipelines to send water to the parched lands west of the Mississippi, but this pipeline helps no one but a few wealthy speculators. Please do not sacrifice our forest and our water. We implore the U.S. Forest Service to select Alternative (1) "No Action" and reject the proposed 11 changes that protect our public lands. Thank you.