

Sabal Trail Employs Eminent Domain With Total Lack of Sensitivity

October 16, 2016



In the coming months, the \$3 billion Sabal Trail pipeline will barrel through Robin Koon's land, excavating away his loved ones' ashes.

Adding to the tragedy of this situation, is the fact that it is

likely that most of the gas transported through this pipe will not benefit our country, but will be exported.

The following article appeared in the [Gainesville Sun](#) on Oct. 16, 2016. Go to this [link](#) for the entire article by Andrew Caplan.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

Levy residents are in path of Sabal Trail pipeline

Posted at 4:45 PM Updated at 4:45 PM

By [Andrew Caplan](#)

In Levy County, an American flag is flown at half-staff in Robin Koon's yard.

Koon, a Bronson resident for about 25 years, leaves it that way to commemorate five relatives, some of them veterans, who died in the last 15 years. Their ashes are spread about 50 yards away from the flag along a tree line, which splits his 2 acres of land.

In the coming months, the \$3 billion Sabal Trail pipeline will barrel through Koon's land, excavating away any remaining ashes, memorials or trees in its way.

"I told them to just go 50 feet that way," said Koon, pointing past the trees into his next lot. "These are my loved ones."

Unfortunately for Koon and his family, the time for negotiations has passed.

The wooden stakes are already planted, following an eminent domain lawsuit filed against Koon, which he failed to respond to. It was a blunder on his part, he admits, but a result of ignoring a company – and its mailings – after receiving what he considered an “insulting” \$1,400 offer for use of the land.

“I started putting stuff in the garbage, started putting stuff in a bag,” he said. “I wanted no part of it.”

Koon, 56, is just one of many landowners affected by the 515-mile pipeline that will cross 1,551 landowners’ properties and span 25 counties throughout Alabama, Georgia and Florida.

Sabal Trail spokeswoman Andrea Grover said the lawsuits were a “very last resort” after multiple failed attempts to work with landowners and said Sabal Trail has the necessary rights for the land it needs for the project.

She would not say how many lawsuits were filed, but The Orlando Sentinel reported 160 were filed by March, with more to come.

Sabal Trail began hosting public meetings and talking with landowners in 2013, Grover added, to hear concerns and plan any needed changes to routes. Koon said he attended one of those meetings last year.

In February, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued Sabal Trail an environmental impact statement and certificate detailing where it can build the pipeline.

“We tried to reach an agreement with every landowner that’s out there,” she said. “They’re very specific about where we can construct the pipeline. Once that certificate is issued, that’s where it’s going to be based on everything that has occurred since June 2013.”

The pipeline will help to service a Duke Energy plant in Citrus

County and Florida Power and Light to support the growing demand for clean-burning natural gas, Grover said. Additionally, five compressor stations are to be built by 2020 to help the flow of gas through the pipeline's course.

The pipeline will be 3 feet underground in most cases, but could go as deep as 60 feet, Grover said, depending on each parcel's topography and proximity to roads, rivers, agriculture, machinery and other factors.

In Koon's case, the 3-foot depth leaves him with an uneasy feeling. His caution stems from recently reading about natural gas pipeline explosions, specifically one under Sabal Trail's parent company, Spectra Energy, which injured a man and scorched his Pennsylvania home in April.

"If they put a bomb out here, I'll never feel safe," Koon said.

Beth Gordon, a Williston resident, said her 32-acre horse farm sits right next to the pipeline, as well. What once was a dream, she said, has become "a nightmare."

"Safety is my main concern," Gordon said. "Spectra Energy has the worst reputation in the industry. This is not for the betterment of locals."

It's been about two years since Koon first met a couple Sabal Trail representatives on his property. That meeting was in between the deaths of his stepdad and brother – and while traveling back-and-forth to Oviedo to care for his 81-year-old mother with dementia, who wants her ashes scattered with her family's. It's been a tradition since 2001.

Construction workers have begun knocking down trees and clearing their path in Levy County, with the excavation process set to begin in about six weeks.

"Honestly, they're going to have to remove me from here when they come down," Koon said. "This is my land."

Contact reporter Andrew Caplan by email at andrew.caplan@gvillesun.com or on twitter @AAcaplan.