



Toiyabe Chapter P.O. Box 8096 Reno, NV 89507

October 29, 2008

Via Email

Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, N.E.; Room 1A
Washington, DC 20426

Re: Scoping Comments on the Proposed Ruby Pipeline Project; Docket No. PF08-9-000.

Dear Secretary Bose:

On behalf of the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club and our 5,500+ members in Nevada and the Eastern Sierra, we are providing scoping issues for the proposed Ruby Pipeline Project. These supplement our comments during the previous scoping period for the project earlier this year. Many of our members live near or recreate on public lands in Northern Nevada which would be crossed by the pipeline. We have many concerns about the potential impacts of pipeline construction and operation on public lands, public resources, recreation, wildlife, cultural resources, wildlands, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species (TES species) along the pipeline route, especially potential adverse impacts to the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Nevada.

There are many issues which should be studied and must be addressed in the pipeline EIS. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

Public Contact: Why was no a public hearing on this project held in Nevada? In trying to interpret the schematic map, it appears that well over 50% of the proposed pipeline route is in Nevada, yet FERC did not schedule a hearing in Nevada communities, including Elko, Winnemucca, or Reno.

Need: Why is this pipeline to Oregon needed? Are there markets for Wyoming gas other than Oregon? Why isn't the pipeline terminus in California or in Washington? Where are existing pipelines and/or existing corridors which could alternatively convey Wyoming gas to the West Coast or elsewhere in the West? Will the Wyoming gas be used by any Nevada customers? If not, why not?

Alternatives: The Sierra Club strongly supports alternatives to the "preferred" route which appears to be the least environmentally acceptable of any of the "preliminary" routes because it would disturb pristine sagebrush steppe areas rather than following already disturbed existing utility corridors.

- At least one route totally avoiding Nevada should be analyzed, since little or no economic or other benefits would result from this project to Nevada, only costs.
- In addition, alternatives should analyze routes which follow existing utility rights-of-way already established in public land plans in Nevada and other affected states, especially along Interstate Highways in Nevada and Idaho.
- Another alternative should be analyzed which follows the Western Energy Corridor (WEC) Plan – why cannot the Wyoming gas be move through pipelines in the WEC?
- An alternative which totally avoids the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge should be analyzed.
- The No Action alternative should be robustly analyzed, since there is no credible documentation to-date that this project cannot be implemented through existing pipelines and/or utility corridors.

Right-of-Way Issues: Is the application for the right-of-way (ROW) for exclusive use for the Ruby pipeline? Or will the owners sublease space for other utilities? Will there be a road along the pipeline? Open or closed to off-road vehicle (ORV) use? Road and traffic impacts should be analyzed.

Pipeline construction: How deep (and wide) would the trench be dug for this project? Since much of the "land" in western Nevada is solid basalt tableland country, would explosives be used for trench construction? How would waterways, dry washes, and steep basalt rimrock be crossed? What other related facilities would be built, besides the pipeline trench? Please analyze the environmental impacts of related facilities. Is a power line required for the proposed pipeline or any of its facilities?

Sagebrush Ecosystem: Northern Nevada public lands support many threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, especially those which are sagebrush-dependent. A Sage Grouse Conservation Plan has been developed for Nevada by the Nevada Department of Wildlife. Any pipeline project segment through Nevada must comply with the state Sage Grouse Plan. What impacts will the proposed project have on Sage Grouse in Nevada and other impacted states? How many leks would the pipeline cross or impact? How much nesting and winter habitat would be disturbed, either directly or indirectly? In addition, what will pipeline impacts be on other sagebrush-dependent sensitive species, such as the pygmy rabbit? What are pipeline impacts on the many native species which are dependent for habitat requirements on the sagebrush, including deer, pronghorn antelope, many bird species (both migratory and resident), and other vertebrates and invertebrates?

Other Public Land Uses/Users: What are pipeline impacts on other uses/users, including wild horses, domestic livestock, cultural resources, other ROWs, recreation, mining, and wildlands? During construction? During operation and maintenance?

Security: What kind of security is needed for the pipeline? What are security impacts on other public land users?

Leaks: How will the pipeline be monitored? What are the chances for leaks? What are leak impacts? How will the pipeline be constructed to be earthquake proof?

Weeds: How will pipeline construction soils disturbance avoid spreading invasive species? How will cheatgrass infestation be prevented?

Soil erosion: What are pipeline impacts on soil stability? How can erosion be prevented? Mitigated?

Wildfires: Will pipeline construction and/or operation increase the frequency or severity of wildfires?

Water Quality: Please analyze pipeline impacts on water quality, both surface and groundwater.

Water: Is water required for pipeline construction/operation? What are the sources of needed water?

Wetland/Riparian Areas: These areas are very valuable for native wildlife and other users. What are potential pipeline impacts and how will adverse impacts be avoided, minimized, and mitigated?

Communities: What are pipeline impacts on nearby Nevada communities and tribes?

Socioeconomic: How many workers would be required for construction and operation of the pipeline? Where would they come from? Where would they be housed, especially in the remote back country areas where no lodging is available? What are worker impacts on local county infrastructure and services?

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Scenic Values: Assess the scenic impacts of a 674-mile utility corridor on remote areas of public land which are now largely barren of human infrastructure.

Cumulative Impacts: What are the cumulative impacts of the proposed Ruby pipeline and facilities and other existing/proposed gas pipeline/facilities along the pipeline corridor route, from Wyoming to Oregon? And from other utilities being located in the future in the same ROW?

Mitigation: What mitigation for pipeline projects is appropriate and effective in the high, cold desert? Any proposed mitigation should be long enough for effectiveness to be assured. What monitoring is required to determine mitigation effectiveness or ineffectiveness? If ineffective, what additional mitigation would be required? A sufficient mitigation and monitoring bond should be required and administered by the BLM and other federal agencies.

There are good geographic reasons why there are so few east-west roads through the Great Basin, including the rugged topography, high mountains, deep valleys and steep basalt rimrocks and canyons. Most roads follow river valleys where construction is less difficult. Transmission lines do cross the Great Basin, but do not usually require the type of construction needed to bury a pipeline.

The Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club would be unlikely to support such a gas pipeline proposed through the heart of sagebrush steppe country for which the need is not well-established, for which other existing corridors have not been fully considered, and for which such significant adverse environmental impacts cannot be avoided, minimized, or mitigated.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



David Hornbeck, Executive Committee Chair
Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club

David von Seggern

David von Seggern, Conservation Chair
Great Basin Group of the Toiyabe Chapter

cc: Mark Mackiewicz, BLM