# New Mexico Gas Company

# Taos Mainline Re-route Project

*Project Overview*

## Introduction and Background

New Mexico Gas Company (NMGC) has filed an application and associated Plan of Development for a right-of-way (ROW) with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Taos Field Office for the relocation of a 6-mile portion of the Taos Mainline natural gas utility pipeline near Pilar, New Mexico. The Taos Mainline is managed by NMGC and is the only natural gas utility pipeline to serve the communities of Taos, Questa, and Red River in Taos County, New Mexico.

The project is located primarily on BLM lands along the Rio Grande corridor. The project segment is approximately 6 miles long and located just northwest of Rinconada and southwest of Pilar. Active landslide deposits in the Rio Grande Gorge immediately southwest of Pilar are causing stress to the steel 8-inch line and could cause natural gas service to be interrupted to these communities. Historically, the existing line ruptured in 1986 and caused service outages for 3 days. Sections of the line in this area have had to be replaced in 1995 and 1996 due to stress on the line.

In addition to the BLM Taos Field Office, NMGC is coordinating with the U.S. Forest Service Carson National Forest, the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT), and New Mexico State Land Office. Additionally, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will be involved as part of Clean Water Act requirements.

The BLM will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze potential impacts according to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. The project will also undergo a review according to Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and Clean Water Act requirements.

## Purpose and Need

The BLM's purpose is to provide for the authorized use of public lands in a manner that serves the public interest and minimizes potential impacts to the affected environment. The need for the action is established by the BLM's responsibility under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to respond to an application for a ROW grant for use of federal land. The BLM will decide whether to grant the ROW and, if so, under what terms and conditions.

The applicant's purpose is to ensure that NMGC's customers in northern New Mexico communities continue to receive uninterrupted natural gas service. To provide more secure and safe service to the communities, NMGC has identified a need to replace the approximately 6-mile section of the existing pipeline with a 12-inch steel pipeline located outside the landslide area.

## Alternatives

The project is designed to reroute the Taos Mainline out of the active landslide area south of Pilar. To reroute around the landslide areas, NMGC proposes to construct a buried 28,871-foot-long (6.08-mile-long) natural gas transmission line from its existing facilities at the Rinconada block valve near Rinconada to near its Pilar block valve just west of Pilar. The existing steel 8-inch pipeline would be replaced with a steel 12-inch pipeline to accommodate future growth in Taos County. Except along cliff faces, the pipeline would be buried at least 48 inches below the surface and would have a trench width of 36 inches.

More details regarding construction, equipment, staging areas, road access, block valves, and health and safety precautions are provided in the Plan of Development and available upon request. Construction is proposed to commence in the fall of 2015 and is anticipated to conclude by summer 2016. The fall construction schedule would be designed to avoid conflicts with tourism both during the summer and winter seasons.

### Option A (Proposed Action):

Route A would be contained within the New Mexico Highway (NM) 68 ROW administered either by the NMDOT or the BLM Taos Field Office, except for 2,605 feet that goes cross-country. Figure 1 (Route A) presents the proposed NMGC route map. NMGC is requesting a ROW grant, 50 feet in width, for approximately 23,742 feet of the Pilar Reroute project within the federal land administered by the BLM. An additional 25-foot-wide temporary use area (TUA) is being sought for vehicle movement, maneuvering parallel and adjacent to the 50-foot-wide ROW grant.

The project proposes the installation of 12-inch-diameter steel underground natural gas distribution pipeline for its entire length, including the portion within the BLM ROW grant. The maximum operating pressure would be 400 pounds per square inch gauge (psig), utilized year round and permanently. Construction would take approximately 160 days to complete. The overall project with the TUA includes 49.7 acres. The BLM portion would represent 27.3 acres in permanent easement and 13.6 acres with the TUA. Route A would extend along the NM 68 ROW for the majority of its length. Route A has the following administrative percentage breakdown:

| | |
|---|---|
| BLM | 23,742.4 feet (82.2% of route) |
| NMDOT from private | 3,674.2 feet (12.7% of route) |
| Private | 1,454.6 feet (5.1% of route) |

Besides the pipeline service road that parallels the system, no new access roads would be needed for Route A. Three staging areas are proposed for Route A.

### Option B (Action Alternative):

Route B also begins at the Rinconada block valve but crosses the Rio Grande, up the gorge slopes to the mesa top, and then back down the slope to tie into the existing Taos Mainline south of Pilar. Extending for 33,067 feet (6.32 miles), Route B predominately lies in BLM land (17,088 feet), but also crosses through portions of Carson National Forest (2,921 feet), New Mexico State Land Office (7,047 feet), and private (6,011 feet) lands. Except for where it goes over the cliffs, all of the pipeline in proposed Route B would be buried. The requested width of the Route B easement would be 50 feet with an additional 25 feet of TUA. Collectively with the TUA, the project would include 56.9 acres. The BLM authorization would include 19.6 acres in

permanent easement and 9.8 acres in TUA. Route B has the following administrative percentage breakdown:

| | |
|---|---|
| BLM | 17,088.2 feet (51.7% of route) |
| Carson National Forest | 2,921.2 feet (8.8% of route) |
| New Mexico State Land Office | 7,047.0 feet (21.3% of route) |
| Private | 6,010.8 feet (18.2% of route) |

Access to Route B would involve fording the Rio Grande, construction of a small temporary road along the gorge slope, and use of the existing Taos Mainline service road. A Carson National Forest two-track road on the mesa would also require improvement. Six possible staging areas are being examined for Route B: three are the same as for Route A and three are located on the mesa near the cliff.

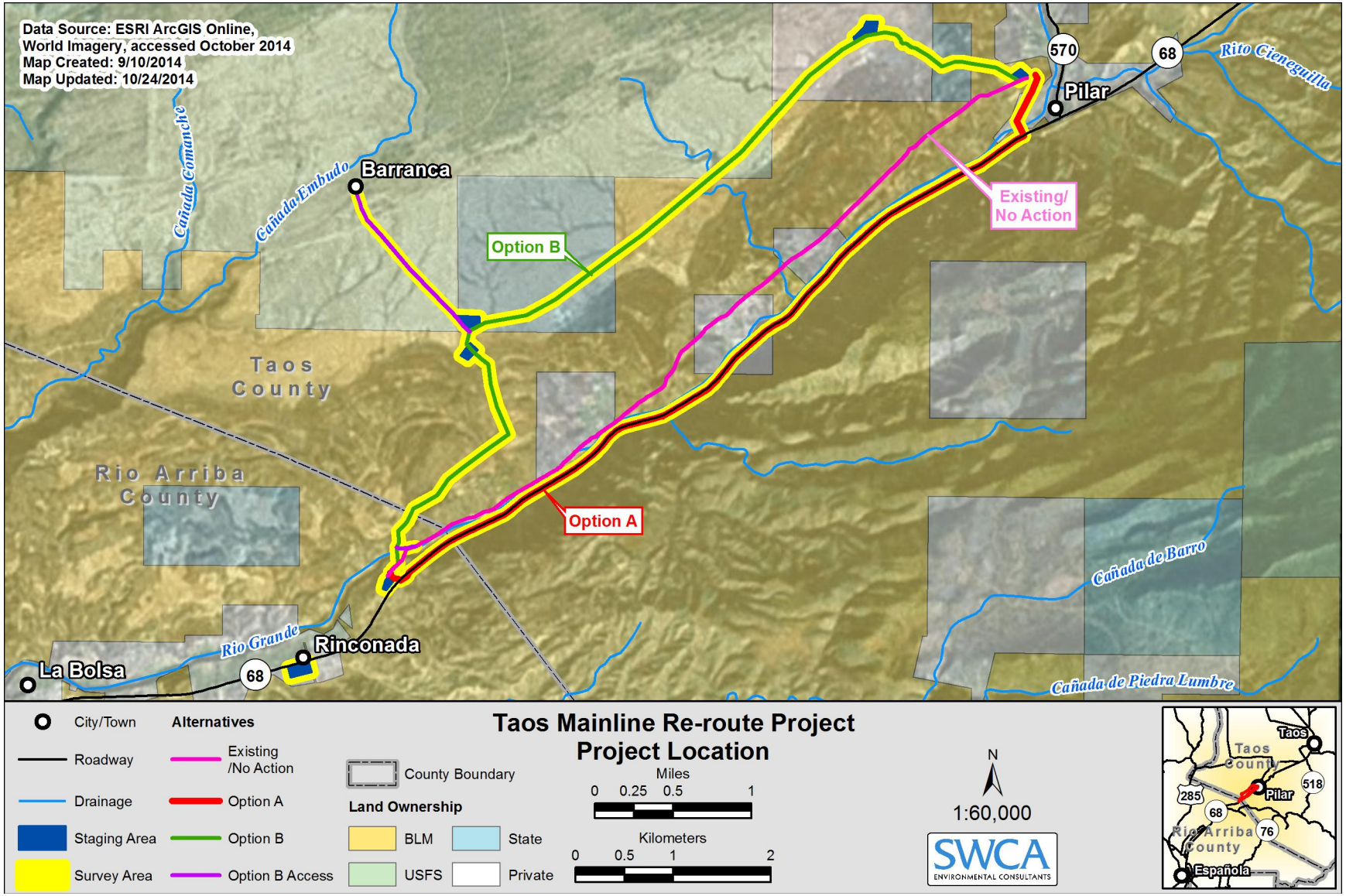
### No Action Alternative:

A no action alternative would leave the pipeline in the landslide deposits along the existing easement for 5.59 miles. This route crosses BLM land and private property. This section of the pipeline was built in 1964 and has had several ruptures in the past 50 years, resulting in service interruptions. Under this alternative, NMGC would continue to monitor the line closely and repair when issues or outages occur.

## Potential Environmental Concerns and Issues

The alternative routes lie within the BLM-managed Lower Gorge Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and immediately west of the Copper Hill ACEC. The Rio Grande National Wild and Scenic River boundary touches each route, as well as the existing Taos Mainline easement. The riparian habitat along the river is listed as critical habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). Other resource values and environmental concerns that will be analyzed in the EA include, but are not limited to, air quality, noise, geologic hazards and resources, soils, water resources, vegetation, wildlife, threatened/endangered/sensitive species, cultural resources, visual resources recreation, wild and scenic rivers, transportation, and health and safety. It is expected that Option A would also affect travel on NM 68, as travel would likely be limited to one lane during construction activities.

NMGC has reviewed a number of potential routes, begun data collection , identified features on the ground, and included project implementation features designed to minimize issues related to construction, the environment, and recreational use of the gorge by geographic information system (GIS) modeling of route Options A and B. To reduce route visibility as much as possible from major thoroughfares, NMGC intends to minimize impacts to visual resources by incorporating the pipeline within the highway corridor and/or extending the route behind ridges, in valleys, and on the mesa.


Data Source: ESRI ArcGIS Online,
World Imagery, accessed October 2014
Map Created: 9/10/2014
Map Updated: 10/24/2014
Barranca
Pilar
570
68
Rito Cieneguilla
Cañada Comanche
Cañada Embudo
Option B
Existing/
No Action
Taos
County
Rio Arriba
County
Option A
Cañada de Barro
Rio Grande
Rinconada
La Bolsa
68
Cañada de Piedra Lumbre
City/Town
Roadway
Drainage
Staging Area
Survey Area
Alternatives
Existing
/No Action
Option A
Option B
Option B Access
County Boundary
Land Ownership
BLM
State
USFS
Private
Taos Mainline Re-route Project
Project Location
Miles
0 0.25 0.5 1
Kilometers
0 0.5 1 2
N
1:60,000
SWCA
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS
Taos
Taos
County
Pilar
518
285
68
Rio Arriba
County
76
Española