

D R A F T (Pending Decision)
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
Prospector Pipeline Company's Eureka Pipeline Project
DOI-BLM-NV-N020-2014-0002-EA
ROW Application NVN-092048

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-NV-N020-2014-0002-EA (February 2014). After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the proposed action with the project design specifications (environmental protection measures) identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Prospector Pipeline Company (PPC) applied for a right-of-way for an approximately 18 mile long natural gas pipeline to supply natural gas from the North Elko Pipeline for delivery to the Newmont Leeville and Gold Quarry Mines. The proposed twelve-inch diameter pipeline and its expected impacts are fully described in the EA and maps contained therein accurately show the proposed location of the pipeline.

I have determined the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Elko Resource Management Plan and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context: The project area is located in Eureka County of Nevada. The proposed pipeline would extend from the North Elko Pipeline Goldstrike Meter Station which is located on private property within the Barrick Goldstrike Mine to the Newmont Leeville and Gold Quarry Mines north of Carlin. The pipeline alignment would be established within existing disturbance areas to the furthest extent possible (primarily mining activity disturbance). The EA has maps and descriptions of the proposed location.

The proposed pipeline would carry natural gas from the North Elko Pipeline to the Leeville and Gold Quarry Mines, providing a reliable supply of natural gas and eliminating the need for current seasonal propane usage. The project would improve energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and enhance safety. The proposed pipeline would have an estimated 50 year operating life.

Intensity:

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

Because the pipeline would be located underground there are few, if any, impacts that would exist beyond the direct disturbance to vegetation and the time required for it to be reestablished along the pipeline route. One benefit of that disturbance would be that the pipeline would effectively act as a firebreak until new vegetation is established.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The proposed action would not likely affect public health or safety. The EA describes the risks associated with underground natural gas pipeline and how those risks are managed and minimized by current design and construction requirements and through stringently enforced operating procedures. Through implementation of these measures, the public health and safety risks associated with projects like the proposed action have been reduced to minimal levels. During construction of the proposed pipeline an emergency response protocol as described in the EA will be followed.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

Construction activities would be conducted with an awareness that vertebrate fossils, and cultural resources may be exposed during pipeline excavation activities. Prior to construction mobilization to the project area, a qualified specialist will provide the construction contractors with Resource Sensitivity Training to allow the contractors to be aware of the potential to inadvertently unearth and to identify potentially unique items in the unearthed trench soils.

During excavation for installation of the proposed pipeline, in areas that could disturb previously undisturbed Tertiary sediments, excavation activities would be conducted with a paleontological monitor present. The proposed pipeline ROW has been located through coordination with the BLM and project archaeologists based on the results of the project Class III cultural resources inventory such that potential direct impact to all known historic properties would be avoided during construction.

Limited Operating Periods (LOPs) were designed to protect mule deer, raptors, and other wildlife from human-caused disturbances by minimizing the type, spatial extent, and timing of project activities permitted. Construction activities would not be authorized to occur within certain spatial limits during those LOPs unless environmental protection measures and construction methods are applied that can measurably avoid impacts to these species.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

None of the issues identified during the NEPA process and analyzed in the EA were deemed to be highly controversial.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The proposed pipeline's design, construction and operating and maintenance procedures are based upon standard and proven technology, materials and protocols that meet or exceed industry standards. The design, construction, operation and maintenance of the proposed pipeline would be reviewed, inspected and monitored by the Nevada Public Utilities Commission. There are no risks associated with the proposed pipeline that would be considered unique or unknown within the gas transmission pipeline industry.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The location of the proposed pipeline is in conformance with the Elko Resource Management Plan. The proposed pipeline would not create precedent given that the recently completed North Elko Pipeline already provides natural gas to an existing mine. The proposed pipeline would deliver natural gas from the North Elko Pipeline to two existing mines. Substituting natural gas for the propane and diesel fuels previously used to support mining operations is viewed as beneficial since the proposed pipeline would make it possible to use a cleaner burning fuel that is delivered to the site with less risk and eliminates the dust and air pollution associated with tanker truck delivery.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified in the EA.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The pipeline was sited to avoid all sites that could be potentially eligible for National Register listing, and to minimize the potential for loss or destruction of any other types of scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

The project will not affect a listed species or its habitat. The pipeline study area may support incidental use by Greater sage-grouse, a “warranted but precluded” species. Due to the current extent and level of mining activity within the Carlin Trend which includes the proposed pipeline preferred alignment, the proposed pipeline study area supports fragmented PGH. Leks have been removed or abandoned and bordering undisturbed areas are not consistently utilized by Greater sage-grouse. Therefore, proposed pipeline construction activities would not likely adversely affect their incidental use of the area in summer and winter.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

3/3/2014

Richard E. Adams, Field Manager

Date