

PUBLIC SCOPING NOTICE

**PREPARATION OF AN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

LOWER VALLEY ENERGY NATURAL GAS PIPELINE

**BIG PINEY AND JACKSON RANGER DISTRICTS
BRIDGER-TETON NATIONAL FOREST**

INTRODUCTION

Public involvement is an important part of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses for the U. S. Forest Service (Forest Service). We ask for your input to determine the issues and the scope of this environmental analysis.

Please take the time to read the following information and let us know your concerns about the proposed action and the decision to be made. We appreciate your contribution of time and effort, and believe the information you share with us will lead to a better decision.

The Forest Service has received an application for a special use permit for the construction and operation of a natural gas pipeline from Lower Valley Energy. This pipeline would bring natural gas service to the Jackson, Wyoming area from a location near Merna, Wyoming. The Forest Service will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to disclose the environmental effects of the proposed project on lands administered by the Big Piney and Jackson Ranger Districts of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Design of the proposed project, including final route selection, a proposed gas processing facility, and access needs along the pipeline route for maintenance, also would be considered in the EIS.

The proposed Lower Valley Energy Natural Gas Pipeline would be located in Sublette and Teton Counties, Wyoming, as shown on the enclosed map. The pipeline would cross portions of the following townships: Township 36 North, Ranges 112 and 113 West; Township 37 North, Ranges 111, 112, and 113 West; Township 38 North, Ranges 113, 114, and 115 West; Township 39 North, Ranges 115 and 116 West; and Township 40 North, Range 116 West; Sixth Principal Meridian.

The major portion of the project area is within Sublette County, with the remainder in Teton County. The proposed pipeline would parallel existing roadways and utility corridors for a portion of its proposed route. A 50-foot wide corridor along the proposed route potentially would be disturbed during construction activities and then reclaimed. The proposed action is approximately 46.5 miles in length. Other potentially feasible pipeline routes will be examined in the environmental analysis.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The current gas supply for Lower Valley Energy's distribution system is a liquid natural gas (LNG) facility located adjacent to its Jackson, Wyoming office. Tanker trucks currently transport LNG from the Shute Creek facility, located south of La Barge, Wyoming, to Lower Valley Energy's LNG facility.



Delivery of LNG to the Jackson area requires that trucks travel approximately 120 miles (one way) on public highways (U.S. highways 287/191/26 and 89/191) on a daily basis. From 2000 to 2003, the number of round trips by tanker trucks steadily increased from 392 to 492 round trips per year. Approximately 665 round trips per year by tanker trucks are projected by 2010. Each tanker truck carries approximately 10,000 gallons of LNG, which is equivalent to approximately 830,000 standard cubic feet (cf) of natural gas. The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a steady supply of natural gas to the Jackson area, eliminating the need for 500 to 600 round trips per year by tanker trucks along public highways.

In addition to LNG, residences and businesses in the Jackson area also rely on a variety of energy resources that include liquid propane (LP), fuel oil, wood burning, cogenerated electricity, and solar power. LP and fuel oil are also trucked into the Jackson area from other areas in Wyoming.

Long-term supplies of natural gas to meet Lower Valley Energy's customer needs in the Jackson area are available in northern Sublette County. A connection to Williams Energy Services' gas pipeline in the Merna area would give Lower Valley Energy the ability to provide gas directly to the Jackson area from producing fields near Merna or farther south in Sublette County.

PROPOSED ACTION

Lower Valley Energy proposes to construct a natural gas pipeline that will provide a steady stream of natural gas to the Jackson area, eliminating the need for trucking LNG along public highways. The proposed pipeline would be located on lands administered by the Forest Service, State of Wyoming lands, and private lands. Most of the pipeline route would be located on the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

The proposed action includes the design, construction, and operation of a pressurized natural gas pipeline from the vicinity of Merna to Jackson, Wyoming, a distance of 46.5 miles. The pipeline would be 8 inches in diameter and would be designed, constructed, and operated by Lower Valley Energy in accordance with U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Pipeline Safety Regulations contained in (Title) 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). A gas processing facility would be constructed in the vicinity of the pipeline's tie-in to an existing pipeline near Merna. Standard pipeline construction techniques would be employed for installation of the pipeline. The pipeline will be buried to a depth that meets DOT regulations. Generally, a 50-foot-wide construction corridor will be used for installation of the pipeline. Additional work areas may be required in areas where special construction techniques are necessary for pipe installation (crossings of roads, streams or wetlands). Temporary work areas will be restored to pre-construction conditions, while the remaining portion of the corridor (approximately 20 feet wide) will be revegetated to serve as a maintenance corridor during pipeline operations.

The proposed pipeline route would cross a number of sensitive resource areas, including waters of the U.S. (streams and wetlands), State of Wyoming wildlife management areas, other wildlife habitats, and recreation areas. For pipeline installations across streams or wetland areas, the pipe will be installed in accordance with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit requirements. The project would require a number of crossings of the Hoback River. Several methods for pipeline installation are being considered for these crossings, including installation by open-cutting the river during low flows and burying the pipeline, horizontal directional drilling, or suspending the pipeline along existing highway bridges.

State of Wyoming wildlife management areas and other wildlife habitats within the Bridger-Teton National Forest are restricted during designated times of the year when wildlife use these areas. Construction through wildlife habitats will be conducted during periods when use of these areas is not restricted.

Pipeline construction is anticipated to begin in mid-year 2006 and the pipeline should be fully operational by the beginning of the 2006 winter season. The pipeline's sole purpose is to deliver processed natural gas to the Jackson area. The pipeline would carry processed gas and is not designed to receive natural gas directly from gas wells. Gas resources discovered along the pipeline route would not be added to the proposed pipeline.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

The proposed pipeline route and other potentially feasible route segments have been identified by Lower Valley Energy based on field and aerial surveys by design engineers. Additional investigations will be used to verify the feasibility of route segments that cross the Hoback River and active landslide or fault areas. Possible alternatives to the proposed action include the selection of combinations of these segments. No alternative route segment to the Hoback Canyon corridor along U.S. Highway 89/191 has been found for this portion of the proposed pipeline route. The scoping process and environmental analysis will evaluate the feasibility of alternatives to the proposed action.

A reasonable range of alternatives will be evaluated and reasons will be given for eliminating alternatives from detailed study. A "no-action alternative" is required, meaning that no pipeline would be constructed, and LNG delivery to Jackson would continue by existing methods. Alternatives will provide different pipeline routes in response to public issues, management concerns, and resource opportunities identified during the scoping process. Scoping comments and existing condition reports will also be used to develop alternatives. It is possible that no other action alternative, other than the proposed action, will be determined to be feasible by the environmental analysis.

No Action Alternative - Continue delivery of LNG to the Jackson area by tanker trucks.

LNG will continue to be supplied to the Jackson area by truck delivery. The number of round trips by tanker trucks using public highways (U.S. highways 287/191/26 and 89/191) to deliver LNG to the Jackson area is projected to increase over time. Projections through 2010 show an increase of 35 percent from 492 deliveries by trucks in 2003 to 665 deliveries in 2010.

NATURE OF DECISION TO BE MADE

The decision, which will be based on this analysis, is whether a special use authorization will be issued to Lower Valley Energy to construct and operate a natural gas pipeline on National Forest System land between Merna and Jackson, either through implementation of the proposed action or an alternative to the proposed action. The decision will include mitigation measures identified as being needed during this analysis in addition to any prescribed in the Forest Plan. This decision will be documented in the Record of Decision for the Lower Valley Energy Natural Gas Pipeline EIS. If the decision that is made would require an amendment to the Forest Plan, the analysis and documentation for the amendment will be included. The decision will be subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 251.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Forest Service is seeking information, comments, and assistance from individuals, organizations and federal, state, and local agencies that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action (36 CFR 219.6). The Big Piney Ranger District has scheduled the preparation of an EIS to determine if the construction and operation of the natural gas pipeline meets Forest Plan objectives. Public comments will be used and disclosed in the environmental analysis documented in the Lower Valley Energy Natural Gas Pipeline EIS. The EIS will evaluate the proposed action, no action, and other alternatives that may be developed during this process.

Public involvement for the proposed project is being initiated by sending this scoping notice to parties on a mailing list prepared by Big Piney and Jackson Ranger Districts. Public participation is being solicited by notifying in person and/or by mail known interested and affected parties. A notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS is being placed in the Federal Register and will be used to inform the general public of the proposed project and request public comments. Announcements in area newspapers will be used to give local notice of planned public meetings. A legal notice in the Casper Star Tribune, the newspaper of record for the Bridger-Teton National Forest, will be used to give the public general notice of the scoping period. The first formal opportunity to comment is to respond to the NOI or this scoping notice, which initiate the scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7). Scoping includes: (1) identifying potential issues, (2) narrowing the potential issues and identifying significant issues from those that have been covered by prior environmental review, (3) exploring alternatives in addition to no action, and (4) identifying potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

The Forest Service has identified the following potential issues. No determination has been made as to which issues will be examined in detail in the environmental analysis. Your input will help determine which of these issues merit detailed analysis and will also help identify additional issues related to the proposed action that may not be listed here.

- a) Coordination with the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) for use of the Hoback Canyon corridor along U.S. Highway 89/191
- b) Coordination with WYDOT for future maintenance of the highway and the pipeline
- c) Effects of pipeline construction on the Hoback River
- d) Effects of pipeline construction on wetlands
- e) Rights-of-way across private lands
- f) Effects of pipeline construction on individuals, property, and highway traffic
- g) Public safety
- h) Pipeline integrity in active landslide and fault areas

- i) Effects on seasonal recreational uses
- j) Effects of pipeline construction and operation on wildlife habitats
- k) Concern that newly discovered gas resources would be added the pipeline, which would encourage exploration along the pipeline route (Note: This concern has been addressed above in the proposed action. Newly discovered gas from wells along the pipeline route will not be added to the proposed pipeline, which will carry only processed gas.)

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS

Greg Clark, District Forest Ranger, Big Piney Ranger District, P.O. Box 218, Big Piney, Wyoming 83113

Nancy Hall, District Forest Ranger, Jackson Ranger District, P.O. Box 1689, Jackson, Wyoming 83001

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Open houses will be held from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Monday, July 19, 2004 at the Teton County Library Auditorium in Jackson and from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday July 20, 2004 at the Bondurant Elementary School in Bondurant. Forest Service and Lower Valley Energy representatives will be available to explain the proposed project and answer questions.

COMMENTS

Your comments on issues that you feel should be evaluated as part of this analysis are essential to this environmental analysis process. While comments will be accepted at any point during the analysis process until a decision is made, to be most useful, your comments must be received on or before **August 31, 2004**. The DEIS is expected to be available in June 2005 and the Final EIS (FEIS) is expected to be available in March 2006.

Comments on the proposed action, possible alternatives, and issues that you feel should be evaluated as part of this analysis or are essential to this environmental analysis process should be submitted by the above date. Please direct any project related questions or comments to the following individuals.

Send written comments to:

Greg Clark, District Ranger
Big Piney Ranger District
Box 218, Big Piney, Wyoming 83113.

Comments may be submitted by telephone to Teresa Trulock, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at 307-276-3375 in Big Piney.

Electronic comments may be sent to <mailroom_r4_bridger_teton@fs.fed.us> with the subject line “Lower Valley Pipeline”.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 251. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person that may request the agency to withhold a submission from requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within (15) days.

Please direct any questions or requests for further information to Teresa Trulock, Project Manager, at 307-276-3375. If needed, call Teresa Trulock to make arrangements to review project maps and information. Information about this project also will be available on the Forest Service website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/btnf/>. The local contact in the Jackson area is Dave Cunningham at the Jackson Ranger District, at 307-739-5423.

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