

to seek court review of the Commission's final order.

The Commission may issue a preliminary determination on non-environmental issues prior to the completion of its review of the environmental aspects of the project. This preliminary determination typically considers such issues as the need for the project and its economic effect on existing customers of the applicant, on other pipelines in the area, and on landowners and communities. For example, the Commission considers the extent to which the applicant may need to exercise eminent domain to obtain rights-of-way for the proposed project and balances that against the non-environmental benefits to be provided by the project. Therefore, if a person has comments on community and landowner impacts from this proposal, it is important either to file comments or to intervene as early in the process as possible.

Protests and interventions may be filed electronically via the Internet in lieu of paper; *see* 18 CFR 385.2001(a)(1)(iii) and the instructions on the Commission's Web site under the "e-Filing" link. The Commission strongly encourages electronic filings.

If the Commission decides to set the application for a formal hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, the Commission will issue another notice describing that process. At the end of the Commission's review process, a final Commission order approving or denying a certificate will be issued.

Comment Date: February 18, 2003.

Magalie R. Salas,
Secretary.

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Docket No. CP03-32-000]

Northwest Pipeline Corporation; Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Assessment for the Proposed White River Replacement Project and Request for Comments on Environmental Issues

January 28, 2003.

The staff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC or

Commission) will prepare an environmental assessment (EA) that will discuss the environmental impacts of the White River Replacement Project involving construction and operation of facilities by Northwest Pipeline Corporation (Northwest) on its Ignacio to Sumas mainline in King County, Washington.¹ These facilities consist of approximately 4,400 feet each of parallel 26-inch- and 30-inch-diameter pipelines at the White River crossing located 3.3 miles east of the City of Auburn, Washington. This EA will be used by the Commission in its decision-making process to determine whether the project is in the public convenience and necessity.

If you are a landowner receiving this notice, you may be contacted by a pipeline company representative about the acquisition of an easement to construct, operate, and maintain the proposed facilities. The pipeline company would seek to negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement. However, if the project is approved by the Commission, that approval conveys with it the right of eminent domain. Therefore, if easement negotiations fail to produce an agreement, the pipeline company could initiate condemnation proceedings in accordance with state law.

A fact sheet prepared by the FERC entitled "An Interstate Natural Gas Facility On My Land? What Do I Need To Know?" was attached to the project notice Northwest provided to landowners. This fact sheet addresses a number of typically asked questions, including the use of eminent domain and how to participate in the Commission's proceedings. It is available for viewing on the FERC Internet Web site (www.ferc.gov).

Summary of the Proposed Project

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a more permanent solution for improved pipeline safety and reliability while restoring the natural environment of the White River and its floodplain at this crossing. Recent highwater events have increased the risk of exposure to the parallel 26-inch- and 30-inch-diameter pipelines (existing pipelines) underneath the White River and along its south and north banks. A previously abandoned 26-inch-diameter pipeline has been exposed presenting a hazard to recreational use of the White River. Northwest installed a temporary

rip-rap structure on the north riverbank in 1996 to protect its existing pipelines.

Northwest proposes to replace the pipelines at a deeper depth by constructing 4,300 feet of parallel 26-inch- and 30-inch-diameter pipelines (replacement pipelines) using a combination of horizontal directional drill (HDD) and conventional open-trench construction. Northwest proposes to abandon, in place and by removal, 3,200 feet of existing pipelines as well as retain 1,100 feet of existing pipelines. Northwest would also remove the previously abandoned 26-inch-diameter pipeline and the rip-rap structure, and would reconstruct the north riverbank to its surrounding contours (*see* Table 1). Northwest seeks authority to:

- Abandon by removal approximately 2,100 feet of existing pipelines from 3 sections: the south floodplain; the north riverbank; and a private property.

- Abandon in place approximately 1,100 feet of existing pipelines from 3 sections: underneath the White River channel (pipelines filled with grout); the slope above the north riverbank (pipelines filled with nitrogen and capped); and underneath State Highway 164 (pipelines immediately underneath highway filled with grout, remaining pipelines filled with nitrogen and capped).

- Retain approximately 1,100 feet of existing pipelines for continued service to the Enumclaw Meter Station.

- Remove the north riverbank rip-rap structure, 380 feet of sheet piling from the south floodplain, and the 665-foot-long previously abandoned 26-inch-diameter pipeline from the White River channel.

- Install approximately 1,200 feet of replacement pipelines in the south floodplain using conventional construction.

¹ Northwest's application was filed with the Commission under section 7 of the Natural Gas Act and part 157 of the Commission's regulations.