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To: Interested Agencies, Indian Tribes, Organizations, and Individuals

Subject: Final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact and for the Animas-La Plata Project, Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, Pre-Construction Facilities Relocation

Enclosed for your information are copies of the Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Animas-La Plata Project, Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, Pre-Construction Facilities Relocation.

The FEA analyzed the environmental effects of relocating three gas pipelines currently located within Ridges Basin, in southwest Colorado. The relocation is necessary to allow construction of the Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, an integral feature of the Animas-La Plata (ALP) Project. The three pipelines include:

- 26-inch-diameter natural gas transmission pipeline, owned by Northwest Pipeline Corporation (Northwest);
- 16-inch-diameter natural gas liquids pipeline (NGL), owned by Mid-America Pipeline Corporation (MAPCO); and
- 10-inch-diameter NGL pipeline, owned by MAPCO.

A Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) was released to the public on April 26, 2002, for public review and comment. Comments and suggested changes were analyzed and changes were made to the FEA where appropriate. The FEA recommends selection of the Northern Route alternative as the preferred route alignment. The FONSI concluded that implementing the preferred alternative will not result in any significant impacts on the environment other than those previously identified in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Animas-La Plata Project.

If you have any questions on the FONSI, FEA or the ALP Project, please contact Pat Schumacher at (970) 385-6590 at our Durango Office.

Sincerely,

Susan Mozer
 Carol DeAngelis
 Acting Area Manager

Enclosures

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
WESTERN COLORADO AREA OFFICE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

ANIMAS-LA PLATA PROJECT, RIDGES BASIN DAM AND RESERVOIR
PRECONSTRUCTION FACILITIES RELOCATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, and the findings of the Final Environmental Assessment: Animas-La Plata Project, Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, Pre-Construction Facilities Relocations (FEA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has determined that the relocation of three pipelines within Ridges Basin, as part of the Animas-La Plata Project (ALP Project), will not result in any significant impacts on the human environment other than those previously identified in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) for the ALP Project; and has selected the Northern Route as the Preferred Route (alignment) for relocation construction.

The pipelines referenced above are:

- 26-inch-diameter natural gas transmission pipeline, owned by Northwest Pipeline Corporation (Northwest);
- 16-inch-diameter natural gas liquids (NGL) pipeline, owned by Mid-America Pipeline Corporation (MAPCO); and
- 10-inch-diameter NGL pipeline, owned by MAPCO.

BACKGROUND

On July 14, 2000, Department of the Interior (Interior), through Reclamation, in cooperation with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Colorado Ute Indian Tribes, released a FSEIS for the ALP Project in compliance with the NEPA. The FSEIS supplemented the environmental documents prepared by Reclamation in 1980 and 1996 for the ALP Project.

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt executed a Record of Decision (ROD) on September 25, 2000, which adopted an ALP Project that would involve construction and operation of a 120,000 acre-foot off-stream reservoir at Ridges Basin, as well as other features. The Colorado Ute Settlement Act Amendments of 2000 (P.L. 106-554, Title

III) that provided Reclamation with the authority to proceed with construction of the modified ALP Project were subsequently signed into law by President William Clinton on December 19, 2000.

Before construction can begin on the dam foundation, relocation of three pipelines that currently run through Ridges Basin must be completed. Reclamation's FSEIS described the potential environmental impacts associated with the relocations, however it did not determine a specific alignment corridor for the pipelines. Following the completion of the FSEIS, additional analysis was performed by Reclamation that narrowed the number of potential pipeline routes (17) described in the FSEIS to two potentially constructible alternatives. These two alternative routes, the Northern Route and the Southern Route, were analyzed in the FEA along with a No Action Alternative. The FEA tiers off the FSEIS and provides supplemental information and analysis.

The lead federal agency for the FEA is Reclamation. However, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is cooperating with Reclamation because of its responsibilities under the Natural Gas Act (NGA) for determining whether natural gas facilities proposed for use in interstate commerce are in the public interest. Because Northwest's 26-inch-diameter transmission pipeline is under the FERC's jurisdiction, the FERC must issue a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (FERC Certificate) before the pipeline can be relocated. Cooperating with Reclamation in the preparation of the FEA fulfills FERC's responsibilities for a NEPA analysis of Northwest's proposed action.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The purpose of the proposed project is to allow for the construction of the Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir. If the Northwest and MAPCO pipelines are not relocated, these facilities would prevent construction of the Ridges Basin Dam.

ROUTING ALTERNATIVES

Two alternative routes, a route around the north side of the reservoir (Northern Route) and one around the southern side of the reservoir (Southern Route) were developed as the most feasible of the several alternative routes that had been evaluated. The Northern Route extends from the south face of Carbon Mountain north and west along the ridge north of the proposed Ridges Basin Reservoir. Review of Northwest's current right-of-way document concluded that Northwest has the right to change the product carried in its pipeline. In addition, MAPCO has proposed to convert one of their lines to carry petroleum products. In response to this information, Reclamation developed an alignment that had a high level of reliability in reducing the risk of a release of petroleum product from a converted pipeline into the reservoir. The Northern Route lies outside of Ridges Basin as a method of reducing this risk. (Discussions concerning the potential

product conversion for the pipelines are found within the FEA, Sections 3.1, 3.2, 5.2, and Attachments A and B.)

The Southern Route extends up the east face of Basin Mountain and then west along the north face of Basin Mountain. The route lies within the Ridges Basin drainage but represents the shortest feasible alignment outside of the maximum reservoir pool. This route would necessitate the use of the most up-to-date technology to reduce the likelihood of a release of petroleum product from a converted pipeline from reaching the reservoir. (A detailed description of both the Northern and Southern Routes is found within the FEA, Section 2.3).

PREFERRED ROUTE DETERMINATION

The comparison of these two routes is discussed below. Although it is longer than the Southern Route, the Northern Route would have fewer engineering and environmental impacts. Table 5-1 of the FEA summarizes the environmental factors considered in assessing the Northern Route and the Southern Route alternatives, and results in the selection of the Northern Route as the preferred route for pipeline relocation.

The Northern Route is superior from a construction standpoint based on considerations of access, temporary work area, and hazardous geologic conditions. Access to the Northern Route is much better than access to the Southern Route. Also, the hazardous geologic conditions along the steep side slopes of Basin Mountain and the difficulties associated with preparation of a construction work area in this location are major factors of concern with construction along the Southern Route. Construction of the Northern Route is less complicated because no significant geologic hazards are apparent along this alignment.

The potential for environmental impacts from pipeline construction within the Southern Route appear greater than those from the Northern Route. Specific environmental concerns associated with the Southern Route identified in the FEA include potential landslides, impact to elk calving grounds, erosion potential, and visual impacts. In contrast, the affects on cultural resources is greater on the Northern Route, however, the affect would still not be any greater than originally estimated for in the FSEIS. Impacts to cultural resources would either be avoided as the pipelines are routed, or would be mitigated for under commitments made in the FSEIS.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE NORTHERN ROUTE AND COMMITMENTS

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Air Quality—Potential environmental consequences and mitigation for air quality impacts from facility construction were addressed in Section 3.16.4 of the FSEIS (page

3-249). Although the FSEIS did not specifically include a discussion of potential air quality impacts associated with pipeline construction, implementation of the general commitments made by Reclamation within the FSEIS on air quality will prevent the occurrence of any new effects to air quality within the area associated with the preferred alternative.

Geology and Soils—Potential effects/hazards associated with the geologic setting and soils were analyzed for the ALP Project within Section 3.8 of the FSEIS (page 3-122). The FEA additionally analyzed the potential hazards associated with the two proposed routes. The findings indicate that the Northern Route is not subject to any new or significantly more hazardous conditions than previously indicated under the FSEIS analysis.

Water Resources—Water resources (surface and groundwater) in the project area are described within Section 3.2.3 of the FSEIS (page 3-17). The FEA analysis indicate that no new changes in ground and surface water quality is anticipated as a result of the implementation of the preferred alternative.

Noise—Construction noise associated with the ALP Project was discussed within Section 3.17 of the FSEIS. A potentially significant impact was identified from dynamite blasting for the pipeline trenching which could exceed local noise standards and disturb nearby residents, recreationists and wildlife. The noise generated by the relocation of the pipeline was also identified as a possible potentially significant impact to golden eagle nesting on Carbon Mountain. Mitigation for these potential impacts was proposed in the FSEIS (pages 3-262 and 3-263) and Reclamation committed to those recommendations within Section 5 (page 5-19). The FEA analysis indicated that no new noise impacts would occur resulting from implementation of the preferred alternative.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The FSEIS analyzed effects to vegetation resources within Section 3.4; to wildlife resources within Section 3.5; to aquatic resources within Section 3.6; and to Special Status Species within Section 3.7. Impacts to those resources were defined and commitments were made in the FSEIS to offset those impacts. No new additional impacts on vegetation, wildlife, aquatic resources, and special Status Species are likely to occur through the implementation of the preferred alternative.

Vegetation --- Reclamation has incorporated in the FEA the following commitments for construction of the pipeline relocation:

1. In visually sensitive areas, restoration of the construction right-of-way includes the revegetation and establishment of small trees and shrubs. Trees and large woody vegetation shall not be planted in the permanent pipeline rights-of-way.
2. Noxious weeds would be identified prior to construction, and control measures implemented during construction.

3. A weed management plan would be prepared as part of the Upland Erosion Control Revegetation, and Maintenance Plan to minimize the risk of weed infestation (requirement of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for approval of Northwest 26" gas pipeline)
4. To minimize clearing of ponderosa pines, the final route alignment and placement of temporary workspace would be planned to minimize impacts on ponderosa parkland.

Wildlife --- Implementation of the preferred alternative will not cause any new or significant impacts to the golden eagle pair noted to utilize the Ridges Basin area. The FEA does reiterate Reclamation's commitment to protect the birds by maintaining the 0.25 mile buffer zone during pipeline relocation construction.

Endangered and Threatened Species --- A Biological Assessment (BA) was submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (FEA, Attachment A). The analysis looked for potential effects of the preferred alternative on four federally listed Threatened or Endangered species (Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, southwestern willow flycatcher, and the bald eagle) and two Candidate species (Gunnison sage grouse and the yellow-billed cuckoo).

The Service concurred with Reclamation's determination of no effect for the Gunnison sage grouse, yellow-billed cuckoo, and southwestern willow flycatcher; and may affect but not likely to adversely affect for the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker and the bald eagle. Reclamation committed to the implementation of several conservation measures in the BA (pages B15-16) and the FEA (Section 5.2) which would reduce the likelihood of impacts occurring to the bald eagle if MAPCO converts the 10" NGL to a liquid petroleum product. (BA, pages B15-16).

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Cultural Resources—The ALP Project lands area have been intensely inventoried by Reclamation as part of earlier ALP proposals. Section 3.9 of the FSEIS (pages 3-142 through 3-144) describe the cultural resources found within Ridges Basin, upper Wildcat Canyon and other adjacent areas. As part of the FEA, additional acres within the Northern Route corridor were examined in 2001. The FEA identified eight sites within the upper Wildcat Canyon area that are either eligible or currently "unevaluated". Reclamation commits to additional investigations and avoidance or mitigation of these eight sites as part of the overall cultural resource mitigation program for the entire ALP Project. The mitigation program is subject to compliance with the Final Amended Programmatic Agreement and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Plan (NAGPRA).

Land Use—The land uses in the project area are described in section 3.113 of the FSEIS (see page 3-215 et seq.). No new significant land use impacts as a result of constructing

and operating the proposed pipeline relocation project are anticipated beyond those originally discussed in the FSEIS (see page 3-223).

Transportation---The transportation resources in the project area are described in Section 3.15.3 of the FSEIS (page 3-236 et seq.). No new significant transportation impacts are projected within the FEA analysis from the pipeline construction now proposed.

Visual Resources-- The FSEIS outlined several measures to be implemented by Reclamation to help reduce impacts associated with the construction and presence of the physical components of the ALP Project. The FEA analysis indicated that no new effects not previously identified within the FSEIS would occur. As indicated on page 3-283 and page 5-20 of the FSEIS, Reclamation would employ the services of a qualified landscape architect to develop and supervise implementation of a landscaping plan that specifically focuses on minimizing the visual impacts of the pipeline relocation project. Measures specific to the pipeline construction include:

1. Areas graded and trenched along the right-of-way would be restored to original grades
2. A directional drilling construction technique would be used to bore through Carbon Mountain.
3. Contour of slopes following backfilling pipeline trench to blend with existing terrain
4. A visual mitigation plan would be developed for the corridor and would include measures to reduce the long-term visual impacts of the right-of-way (requirement for the FERC approval process).

Recreation—The FSEIS describes effects to recreation for the entire ALP Project within Section 3.11.3.2 (page 3-182), while the FEA analyzed the effects of the proposed action on existing and future recreation resources. The Northern Route pipeline relocation construction will affect current recreation, however, these affects will be short-term and are not considered significant. The overall recreation development plan for the Ridges Basin Reservoir will incorporate current uses.

COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

Written Comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA)--The DEA was distributed on April 26, 2002 to 197 Federal, state and local agencies, Indian Tribes, elected officials, local libraries, landowners and abutters, environmental groups, interested citizens, and the news media. It was also made available on the Reclamation Internet Web site and a letter of availability was sent out to other members of the public not on the primary pipeline relocation mailing list. A public comment period of more than 30 days was noticed, with comments requested on the DEA by May 28, 2002.

Eleven comments were received, including five from Federal agencies, one from a county agency, two from environmental groups, two from landowners and one from an Indian

Tribe. No new issues were raised by commentors that had not been previously been addressed either by modifications in the design of the preferred alternative or through analysis within the NEPA process. One issue that was brought up by some commentors throughout the process was whether an Environmental Assessment (EA) was the appropriate level of NEPA analysis for these pipeline relocations. It was determined within the FEA that since no new significant environmental impacts are associated with the abandonment and relocations activities, that the EA would fully meet all NEPA compliance requirements for this action. Issues raised by the commentors have been addressed and changes made in the text of the FEA where appropriate. Also, see Attachment C in the in the FEA for comments and responses to comments.

Native American Consultation--The FSEIS (pages 3-143 and 6-12) describes the consultation activities that were initiated with Native American groups that are interested in the Ridges Basin area, including the area that would be affected by relocation of the Northwest and MAPCO pipelines within Ridges Basin. No new concerns were identified by tribal organizations that had not previously been consulted on under the Programmatic Agreement or covered within the NAGPRA plan. The 26 tribes listed below were identified to have ancestral or contemporary ties to the Ridges Basin project area:

Hopi Tribe	Pueblo of San Juan
Jicarilla Apache Nation	Pueblo of Sandia
Navajo Nation	Pueblo of Santa Ana
Pueblo of Acoma	Pueblo of Santa Clara
Pueblo of Cochiti	Pueblo of Santo Domingo
Pueblo of Isleta	Pueblo of Taos
Pueblo of Jemez	Pueblo of Tesuque
Pueblo of Laguna	Pueblo of Zia
Pueblo of Nambe	Pueblo of Zuni
Pueblo of Picuris	San Juan Southern Paiute
Pueblo of Pojoaque	Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Pueblo of San Felipe	Uintah-Ouray Ute Tribe
Pueblo of San Ildefonso	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

Coordination and Consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service—Reclamation worked closely with the Service for proper implementation of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) . A Planning Aid Memorandum containing recommendations from the Service was provided to Reclamation in October 2001. Reclamation modified the analysis in the FEA to meet the Service's concerns. A BA to meet ESA requirements was submitted to the Service in April 2002. The Service provided a concurrence memo for Reclamation's effect determination in May 2002. In addition, Reclamation incorporated commitments in the FEA and BA to meet the Service's concerns relating to hazardous material response planning and potential product conversion for the MAPCO 10" pipeline.

