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The Piceance Basin Expansion Project (Piceance Project) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared by the staff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC or Commission) with the cooperation and assistance of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) under FERC Docket No. CP05-54-000. The EIS was prepared to fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations [CFR], Parts 1500 -1508); the FERC's implementing regulations (18 CFR 380); and the BLM's right-of-way (ROW) grant regulations (43 CFR 2800 and 2880).

Wyoming Interstate Company, Ltd. (WIC) proposes to construct, own, and operate a new natural gas transmission system in Colorado and Wyoming. The proposed Piceance Project would be capable of transporting 350,000 dekatherms per day (Dthd) (equivalent to 341 million cubic feet per day [MMcfd]) of natural gas from supply basins in the central Rocky Mountains to the Colorado Interstate Gas Company (CIG) Wamsutter Compressor Station (Sweetwater County, Wyoming). From there, other interstate transporters would be able to ship the gas to markets in the western and central United States (U.S.).

In accordance with NEPA, this document's purpose is to inform the FERC decision-makers, the public, and other permitting agencies about the potential adverse and beneficial environmental impacts associated with the proposed project and its alternatives, and to recommend practical, reasonable, and appropriate mitigation measures that would reduce adverse impacts to the extent possible. Most of the environmental impacts would occur during the construction period. We¹ considered and/or evaluated a range of system and route alternatives.

The vertical line in the margin identifies text that has been modified in this final EIS and differs from the corresponding text in the draft EIS.

Proposed Action

The proposed Piceance Project would primarily consist of construction and operation of 141.8 miles of 24-inch-diameter interstate natural gas pipeline. The pipeline would extend between the existing CIG Wamsutter Compressor Station in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, and the existing CIG Greasewood Compressor Station in Rio Blanco County, Colorado. The flow of natural gas would be northward, from Greasewood to Wamsutter. In Wamsutter, interconnections with two existing interstate shippers would be constructed. In addition to the proposed pipeline, WIC's new transportation system would include installing a new compressor (1,650 horsepower) within the CIG Greasewood Compressor Station, and constructing four metering stations, nine mainline valves, and three pigging facilities.

¹ "We," "us," and "our" refer to the environmental staff of the Commission's Office of Energy Projects. Unless specifically identified otherwise, the recommendations and conclusions presented in the EIS are those of the FERC staff.

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Public Involvement

On July 14, 2004, the FERC issued a *Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Piceance Basin Expansion Project, Request For Comments On Environmental Issues, and Notice of Public Scoping Meetings and Route Inspection* (NOI). The NOI briefly described the project components, invited written comments from the public on the proposal, and listed the date and location of two public scoping meetings to be held in communities along the route. The NOI was sent to about 1,180 entities on a mailing list that included the landowners crossed and/or adjacent to the proposed ROW; federal and state agencies; Native American tribes; non-governmental and environmental organizations; libraries; the media; and other potentially interested citizens.

We held public scoping meetings in Craig, Colorado (August 3, 2004) and Meeker, Colorado (August 4, 2004). An additional scoping meeting was held in Rawlins, Wyoming, on June 8, 2004, for a related project proposed by Entrega Gas Pipeline Inc. (Entrega) (Entrega Project, FERC Docket No. CP04-413-000), which shares the same pipeline route in Wyoming as the Piceance Project. Comments received at the Rawlins scoping meeting were considered relevant to both the Entrega and Piceance Projects. During the same time period, we organized and conducted a separate “agency” scoping meeting with federal and state agency representatives, and local officials to solicit input and coordinate our review of the proposed project. This meeting was held in Rifle, Colorado, on August 5, 2004.

In addition to oral and written comments received during agency and public scoping meetings, the Commission received written comments during and after the close of the public scoping period (August 16, 2004). In total, 43 written correspondences² containing project comments were received. Each letter was evaluated and comments were divided into issue groups. When written comments were combined with oral meeting comments, 307 individual comments were received.³

The draft EIS was filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and mailed to 511 federal, state, and local agencies; elected officials; Native American tribes; newspapers; public libraries; intervenors to the FERC's proceeding; affected landowners; and other interested parties. Three public meetings were held in the project area to receive comments on the draft EIS. These meetings were conducted in Craig, Colorado (June 7, 2005); Wamsutter, Wyoming (June 8, 2005); and Meeker, Colorado (June 9, 2005). Oral comments were received from only one local individual who was in support of the project. Written comments were received from two federal agencies, two state agencies, two local agencies, one organization, and the project applicant. The final EIS was mailed to approximately 535 federal, state, and local agencies; elected officials; Native American tribes; newspapers; public libraries; intervenors to the FERC's proceeding; affected landowners; and other interested parties who provided scoping comments, commented on the draft EIS, or wrote to the FERC asking to receive a copy of the document.

² Written correspondences included letters, return mailers (attached to our NOI), and electronic mail.

³ Due to the similarity of project location and timing between the Piceance Project and the Entrega Project, comments received during the Entrega Project scoping process were considered relevant and included as part of the NEPA scoping process for the Piceance Project. The total reflects the sum of all individual comments, even if the same comment was received from the same person multiple times and in different formats (oral or written).

Areas of Concern Raised by Commentors

Issues raised during scoping and during the comment period on the draft EIS included project purpose and need; scope of the analysis; alternatives; construction procedures; land use issues; effects on soils, water, vegetation, wildlife, threatened and endangered species; cultural resources; air quality; weed management; socioeconomic effects; noise impacts; public safety; cumulative impacts; and compensation and easement agreements. These concerns and others have been addressed in this EIS.

Project Impacts

Construction of the proposed Piceance Project would disturb approximately 1,884 acres of land, including the pipeline construction ROW, additional temporary workspace areas, aboveground facility sites, pipe storage and contractor yards, and upgrades to existing roads to be used for construction access. Approximately 860 acres of the 1,884 acres used for construction would be required for operation of the project. The remaining 1,024 acres of land would be restored and allowed to revert to former uses.

Approximately 54 percent of the land affected by construction and operation of the Piceance Project would be public lands. Of the total land affected by construction, the BLM manages 46 percent; the State of Colorado manages 8 percent (consisting of Colorado Division of Wildlife [CDOW] and Colorado State Land Board properties). The remaining 46 percent of the lands crossed by the pipeline would be private lands.

If the Piceance Project is approved, WIC proposes to begin construction in October 2005, with construction completed and the pipeline in-service by February 2006. Since winter construction can be complicated by weather conditions and can result in environmental impacts that differ from construction during other seasons, we have recommended that WIC prepare a Winter Construction Plan to address construction and reclamation procedures, as well as specific mitigation measures.

Geology (Minerals, Geologic Hazards, Paleontology)

Project construction and operation would not substantially alter existing topography because the construction ROW would be recontoured to match the adjacent terrain. The Piceance Project would not interfere with oil and gas drilling or any current active mining operations. Because the proposed pipeline would be located adjacent to existing pipelines where they cross oil and gas strata or shallow coal beds, construction of the Piceance Project would not further reduce access to underlying resources. Potential for earthquake damage from ground shaking and subsidence is low. Based on the operating experience of CIG's Uinta Basin Lateral and other existing pipelines, the proposed Piceance Project route would avoid or reduce the area of difficult construction (steep slopes, congested utility corridors, rock outcrops, steep ravines), soil instability, and known geological hazards (flooding and sinkholes hazards). The Piceance Project would cross about 115 miles of geologic formations that contain vertebrate fossils and noteworthy occurrences of invertebrate and plant fossils. WIC has conducted pre-construction surveys and would monitor pipeline construction to protect or recover important fossils.

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Soils and Invasive Plant Species

The majority of the Piceance Project would cross arid to semi-arid native rangelands that are underlain by relatively shallow, droughty soils that are susceptible to wind and water erosion. Other constraints include rocky and saline/alkaline soils. The pipeline also would cross about 19 acres of hydric soils, an indicator of areas that may contain drain tiles for crop production. WIC has committed to replace or repair any drain tiles damaged by construction activities; maintain water flow to irrigation systems throughout construction; and restore or repair the damage to irrigation systems. WIC would preserve topsoil by limiting soil stripping to the area over the pipeline trench; implementing best available erosion control practices included in its project-specific *Upland Erosion Control, Revegetation, and Maintenance Plan* (WIC's Plan) and the BLM's Plan of Development (POD); and applying revegetation seed mixtures appropriate for the climate and land uses. We have supplemented WIC's proposed mitigation with additional recommendations to minimize potential winter construction impacts on soil resources and restoration efforts, and control the spread of weeds along the ROW, including continuing weed control along the ROW for the life of the project.

Water Resources

WIC would not use groundwater during construction or operation. To protect surface and groundwater resources, parking and refueling activities would be set back 100 feet from waterbodies. The Piceance Project would cross 4 perennial and 178 intermittent waterbodies. A horizontal directional drill (HDD) crossing would be completed at three perennial rivers (Little Snake, White, and Yampa Rivers) to avoid adverse effects on aquatic life and fisheries. WIC would implement a dry crossing technique for the remaining perennial cold water stream (Dry Fork of Piceance Creek), in accordance with WIC's project-specific *Wetland and Waterbody Construction and Mitigation Procedures* (WIC's Procedures). The remaining streams are intermittent and would be crossed using open-cut crossing techniques. Where WIC and Entrega share the same general crossing location at the Yampa and Little Snake Rivers, we have recommended that WIC coordinate its crossing of these rivers with Entrega to minimize in-stream and bank disturbances. In order to hydrostatically test the proposed pipeline, WIC would use 52.6 acre-feet (approximately 17.2 million gallons) of water from three different rivers; just over half of the water would be obtained from the Little Snake River and the rest would be obtained from the White and Yampa Rivers. Withdrawals from these rivers may affect designated surface water uses, including aquatic life and fisheries. WIC has modified its draft Hydrostatic Test Plan to include information that identifies withdrawal and discharge locations and techniques that would be used to reduce impacts to native fish species. To further minimize potential impacts on surface water flows and related resources, we have recommended that WIC consult the appropriate state and federal fisheries agencies to determine suitable flow conditions and locations for hydrostatic test water withdrawals and discharge locations. The pipeline would cross about 0.9 mile of emergent wet meadows and shrubland wetlands. To minimize wetland impacts, measures from WIC's Procedures would be implemented, which would provide an adequate level of environmental protection.

Vegetation

The Piceance Project would disturb approximately 77 acres of grassland, 1,519 acres of shrublands, 100 acres of agricultural land (including some wetlands), and 188 acres of woodland. WIC's Plan would be

followed in order to stabilize and re-seed disturbed areas to restore wildlife habitat and livestock grazing use. WIC would implement site-specific measures to avoid or reduce the loss of larger trees in riparian woodland areas at stream and river crossings. We also have recommended additional mitigation to avoid removal of potential bald eagle roosting trees. Revegetation success along the ROW would be monitored for several years by the FERC and BLM staffs. Because of limited rainfall and high evaporation rates, native vegetation community recovery would be long-term, ranging from a minimum of 5 to 7 years in grasslands, up to 20 to 30 years in shrublands, and more than 50 years in woodland communities.

Fish and Wildlife

WIC would construct across four different waterbodies in Colorado that support fish species, consisting of one that supports warmwater species and three that support coldwater species. WIC would avoid bank and channel disturbance to the Little Snake, White, and Yampa Rivers by using the HDD crossing method. The remaining stream (Dry Fork of Piceance Creek) would be crossed using a dry crossing technique in accordance with WIC's Procedures. WIC would avoid construction of crossings during cold and warmwater fisheries spawning periods as designated by state agencies. Open-cut crossings would cause short-term (usually 3 days or less) suspended sediment increases in intermittent stream and river channels.

The Piceance Project would disturb wildlife habitat, displace individual animals, and contribute to habitat fragmentation by expanding existing pipeline corridors. The proposed route would cross approximately 33 miles of critical elk, mule deer, and pronghorn winter habitat in Colorado; and about 3 and 8 miles of mule deer and pronghorn crucial winter habitat in Wyoming, respectively. Construction activities would not be allowed by BLM and/or state agencies in critical big game winter habitat from November 15 to April 30 in Wyoming and from December 1 to April 30 in Colorado with one exception. The BLM Little Snake Field Office and CDOW have agreed to allow construction activities between December 1 and December 31 from MP 88.9 to MP 99.0 (big game winter habitat). Based on WIC's proposed schedule, they would need to complete construction activities in the designated big game wintering areas before the seasonal closure period begins. In addition, the pipeline would cross two State Wildlife Areas in Colorado. No Wildlife Habitat Management Areas would be crossed in Wyoming. To minimize impacts to wildlife, horses, and livestock, WIC has committed to installing ditch plugs with ramps within the construction trench and cap uncovered pipe at the end of each workday. Disturbed winter habitat areas would be re-seeded with mixtures approved by state wildlife agencies and the BLM.

WIC's proposed construction schedule would not overlap the breeding season for most migratory birds. Should construction be extended into the raptor nesting season, we recommend that WIC conduct pre-construction raptor nest surveys and abide by appropriate buffer zones and seasonal construction restrictions to prevent or minimize impacts to nesting raptors.

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Special Status Species

We previously requested that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) consider the draft EIS as the Biological Assessment for the proposed project. The resulting Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation process has not yet been completed. Our recommended protection measures and effects determinations are discussed below.

Three federally listed plant species (Dudley Bluffs bladderpod, Dudley Bluffs twinpod [also known as the Piceance twinpod], and Ute ladies-tresses) could potentially occur within the pipeline construction ROW. WIC would conduct pre-construction surveys to determine the potential presence of these species prior to construction. If listed plant populations are found, we have recommended that WIC notify the BLM, FWS, and FERC to determine the most appropriate methods for avoiding or minimizing the loss of individual plants. Based on negative results from 2004 field surveys, WIC-committed protection measures, and our recommended protection measures, we have determined that the Piceance Project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect these three plant species.

The proposed facilities would require construction across three perennial rivers (Little Snake, White, and Yampa Rivers). Based on recommendations from the FWS and CDOW, WIC has proposed to HDD the Little Snake, White, and Yampa Rivers. The federally listed Colorado pikeminnow may be present at the Yampa River crossing and its designated Critical Habitat occurs downstream of both the proposed White and Yampa River pipeline crossings. Based on WIC's HDD crossing plan, we have determined that the waterbody crossings associated with the Piceance Project may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect this fish species or adversely modify its Critical Habitat. In the event that WIC was unable to complete a successful HDD crossing of the Yampa or White Rivers, WIC has indicated that they would not proceed with a non-HDD crossing method until it has filed a site-specific alternative crossing plan with the Secretary of the Commission for review.

Populations of three other federally listed fish species (bonytail chub, humpback chub, and razorback sucker) were determined to be greater than 30 miles downstream in both the Yampa and White Rivers. Therefore, it is unlikely they would be affected by river crossing activities. We have concluded that the crossing of these waterbodies may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect these species or adversely modify their Critical Habitat.

WIC proposes to withdraw hydrostatic test water from the Little Snake, White, and Yampa Rivers; these withdrawals would be subject to seasonal restrictions. WIC proposes to discharge hydrostatic test waters to upland areas within the same drainage basin. We have determined that hydrostatic testing may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect federally listed fish species.

One federally listed bird (bald eagle) and one mammal (black-footed ferret) potentially occur in the project area. Based on known occurrence patterns, WIC-committed mitigation measures, and our recommended habitat and population protection measures, we have determined that the Piceance Project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle and black-footed ferret.

The Piceance Project would cross within 2 miles of 26 historic leks (strutting grounds) for sage grouse (a BLM sensitive species). To prevent disruption of breeding activities, pre-construction surveys were completed in 2005 to determine the presence of active lek sites. WIC's proposed construction schedule would avoid seasonal timing constraint periods for those construction areas located within 2 miles of an active lek site. In addition, WIC would minimize habitat impacts on lek sites by reducing the width of the ROW within 0.25 mile of a lek to the extent practical, and would not construct aboveground facilities within 0.25 mile of a lek. Appropriate seed mixtures would be applied to restore sage grouse habitat and WIC has committed to coordinating with the appropriate agencies regarding reclamation efforts.

The Piceance Project could potentially affect BLM sensitive species, including 5 plants, 5 mammals, 12 birds, 2 amphibians, 1 reptile, and 4 fish. Based on WIC-committed protection measures and our analysis, we have concluded that while there may be effects on individuals, construction and operation of the Piceance Project would not cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of species viability.

Land Use, Recreation, and Visual Resources

The primary land use crossed by the Piceance Project would be rangeland that is used for livestock grazing. The proposed construction work area (i.e., the construction ROW and temporary additional workspaces) would not be located within 50 feet of any occupied residences or commercial buildings. A total of 860 acres would be newly dedicated to pipeline utility uses for the project life. The Piceance Project would conform to existing BLM land use plans and would acquire required permits and approvals to construct across state lands.

The Piceance Project would not cross or affect any developed recreation areas. In Colorado, the project would cross two CDOW properties (State Wildlife Areas). No wildlife habitat management areas would be crossed in Wyoming. The proposed pipeline would cross three designated natural conservation areas, all in Colorado. Pipeline construction could overlap with use of these areas during the fall and winter big game hunting seasons. WIC would coordinate with the agency managers of these areas to minimize conflicts with recreational user access to these areas.

The Piceance Project would generally be located in remote rural areas of Wyoming and Colorado, and would be located in or immediately adjacent to existing utility corridors over the majority of its route, though about 25.6 miles of construction would not be collocated with an existing utility corridor. The Piceance Project would be consistent with BLM Class III and IV Visual Resource Management criteria. Most aboveground facilities would be located at pre-existing facilities or within the proposed permanent ROW along lightly traveled roads.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resource inventories have been conducted along the majority of the proposed route, with only two extra workspaces, two 10-acre staging areas, four reroutes, and 0.4 mile of access road remaining to be surveyed. As of June 2005, these areas are now inventoried and will be reported on separately in an addendum report. Additional access roads requiring survey may be identified. To date, the completed surveys have identified 123 cultural resource sites in Colorado and 60 sites in Wyoming within the surveyed

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area. Of these sites, 35 sites in Colorado and 16 sites in Wyoming have been recommended for eligibility, or are officially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Additional investigations are recommended at a number of cultural resource sites to determine their NRHP eligibility.

The process of fully complying with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act has not yet been completed for the Piceance Project. Surveys and evaluative testing have not been completed and reroutes to avoid eligible sites have not been finalized. Once evaluations are complete and it has been determined which sites can or cannot be avoided, the FERC, in consultation with the BLM and the Colorado and Wyoming State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), would make final determinations of NRHP eligibility and project effects. For historic properties that would be adversely affected, the FERC and the BLM, in consultation with the SHPOs, would review the adequacy of WIC's proposed Treatment Plan. Once the Treatment Plan is approved, WIC would implement the specified treatment measures before any notice to proceed with project construction is authorized in any given area. Implementation of treatment would occur only after approval of the proposed project by both the FERC and the BLM. The FERC would ensure that treatment is carried out.

Socioeconomics and Transportation

WIC proposes to employ a peak workforce of about 600 workers to construct the pipeline and associated facilities during the final quarter of 2005, potentially extending into 2006. We estimated that about 92 percent of the workforce would consist of non-local personnel. The project would be completed using two separate workforces (spreads). One spread would extend northward from the existing CIG Greasewood Compressor Station in western Colorado to Moffat County Road 8 (milepost [MP] 75.6). The portion of this spread north of the Yampa River would be completed simultaneously with the southern spread segment (from the Greasewood Compressor to the Yampa River). The second spread would extend from the northern end of the first spread (MP 75.6) northward to the existing CIG Wamsutter Compressor Station in Wyoming. The concurrent construction activity on the two spreads near Craig at the outset of the project could strain the local supply of the temporary housing. Demand could ease once construction on the first spread shifts southward and construction on the second spread progresses northward. However, we anticipate the availability of temporary housing to be very limited in Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties, Colorado, based on the quantity of temporary housing and ongoing energy development activities. To help alleviate the housing shortage issue during construction, WIC plans to reopen several closed campgrounds and trailer parks in the project area, and it plans to pay for upgrades at several small campgrounds which require additional sewage facilities.

We anticipate increased short-term demand for public services, particularly for emergency medical response to respond to the large construction workforce. Alternatively, long-term demands for public services would not occur since the operational workforce would be small. Local communities would receive short-term benefits from worker goods and services expenditures, and long-term benefits from property taxes. The aggregate assessed valuation for pipeline and aboveground facilities was estimated to be \$27.8 million, of which 17 percent of the value would be in Wyoming and 83 percent in Colorado. Total annual property tax on this aggregate valuation was estimated to be \$0.58 million. These tax revenues would typically be used by local and state governments for infrastructure improvements such as roads, schools, and health facilities, and to meet other needs of the community.

WIC would acquire land for its pipeline through easement agreements with private landowners. Potential impacts on land values from construction of a new pipeline are highly site-specific. Permanent structures could not be built over the pipeline, but existing land uses, such as livestock grazing, could continue as before. Our analysis concludes that there would be no disproportionate economic or public safety effects on minority or low-income communities as a result of the Piceance Project construction and operation.

WIC would limit delays along and damage to state and federal highways by boring beneath them. Smaller roads would be trenched, which would cause short-term delays. Construction of the Piceance Project would utilize a variety of secondary roads. Use of these roads would be subject to weight restrictions. WIC's Traffic and Transportation Management Plan defines the road conditions, traffic management procedures, and the procedures for repairing BLM, county, and state roads.

Air Quality and Noise

Construction of the pipeline and aboveground facilities would generate short-term fugitive dust along roadways and along the construction corridor during clearing and grading activities. WIC has committed to control fugitive dust using water. WIC would install a natural gas-fired compressor at the existing CIG Greasewood Compressor Station in Colorado. In a related action (TransColorado's North Expansion Project), TransColorado Gas Transmission Company (TransColorado) plans to install a new compression station adjacent to CIG's Greasewood Compressor Station.⁴ WIC would acquire operating permits from Colorado air quality permitting agencies, which may impose permit conditions to ensure that the new compressor's operation would meet air quality standards.

The new compressor at the CIG Greasewood Compressor Station would be located at the Greasewood Hub, a general location where multiple pipelines interconnect. Although this location is rural, there are other existing compressor stations at the Greasewood Hub. The nearest noise-sensitive area to the CIG Greasewood Compressor Station would be over 1,700 feet away. With the addition of the new compressor, the operation of this station is expected to remain in compliance with the FERC 55 decibels on the A-weighted scale standard. To ensure compliance with the FERC noise standard, we have recommended that WIC conduct noise measurements when operations begin to verify compliance.

Reliability and Safety

WIC would comply with U.S. Department of Transportation pipeline materials and construction standards for natural gas pipelines. Where located in a utility corridor with other pipelines, the WIC pipeline would be typically offset a minimum of 40 feet from adjacent pipelines, which greatly reduces the risk of pipeline damage from any repair activities on adjacent pipelines. After construction, WIC must initiate a pipeline integrity management plan. As part of its plan, WIC must identify High Consequence Areas (HCAs), which typically include residential areas or areas where people congregate. One potential HCA has been identified

⁴ On May 27, 2005, TransColorado's North Expansion Project was approved by the FERC under a separate filing (FERC Docket No. CP05-45-000).

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as the the parking lot at the LUVS Truck Stop near the CIG Wamsutter Compressor Station in Wyoming. Portions of the pipeline that are located within HCAs would require inspection every seven years.

Cumulative Impacts

We identified existing and foreseeable projects that overlap or could overlap with the Piceance Project in time and space throughout the length of the pipeline. The major existing projects are the one or more existing pipelines that the Piceance Project would parallel over nearly the entire length of the project. The major foreseeable projects are:

- EnCana Oil and Gas USA's (EnCana's) Meeker Pipeline and Gas Plant Project, located in Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties, Colorado;
- TransColorado's North Expansion Project, consisting of a new TransColorado Greasewood Compressor Station and a new 24-inch-diameter 2,200-foot-long lateral to the CIG Greasewood Compressor Station; and
- the Entrega Project, a 36- to 42-inch-diameter new natural gas pipeline that would be constructed in the same pipeline corridor as the Piceance Project over a distance of about 98 miles.

The following are the primary cumulative impacts identified:

1. Construction of the Piceance Project would expand the width of existing pipeline corridors, particularly where the Entrega Project and Piceance Project pipelines would be routed adjacent to one another. Both projects would temporarily impact irrigated pasture at the Yampa River crossing as well as dry pasture at the Little Snake River crossing. There would be a corresponding expansion of wildlife habitat discontinuities in shrubland and woodlands, which may inhibit or limit wildlife movements and increase predation rates on certain species such as the sage grouse. Where WIC proposes to construct its pipeline adjacent to the Uinta Basin Lateral, Entrega Project pipeline, or other existing pipeline between MP 0 and MP 98, WIC has agreed to reduce its offset to 40 feet (from 50 feet) where feasible to reduce impacts to soils, vegetation, and wildlife habitat.
2. The pipeline construction workforces for the Piceance and Entrega Projects could overlap between the Yampa River and Wamsutter during the fall and winter construction seasons of 2005. Additionally, a smaller construction workforce associated with the TransColorado North Expansion Project also would be in the Greasewood Hub area in the fall and winter of 2005. Construction associated with the EnCana Meeker Pipeline and Gas Project is proposed for mid-2005 and beyond. These projects could cause cumulative increases in short-term demand for temporary housing, short-term demand for public services, and local congestion on secondary roads that would be used for construction access by these projects.

Alternatives Considered

We have considered the No Action Alternative, which would deny the proposed project. While this alternative would eliminate the environmental impacts identified in this EIS, it also would deny U.S. markets access to the 350 Dthd (341 MMcfd) of natural gas which the Piceance Project would transport.

We evaluated possible system alternatives including the use of other existing pipeline systems and the use of the proposed Entrega Project. Existing interstate natural gas pipelines that traverse the Piceance Basin would need to be modified (looped and/or compression added) to transport the volume of natural gas that would be transported by WIC's Piceance Project. Expansion of other existing pipeline systems would likely cause surface disturbance comparable to that resulting from the construction of the Piceance Project.

We also considered the option of combining the Entrega Project and Piceance Project pipelines into a single pipeline. While requiring substantially less pipeline than the sum of the two proposed projects and resulting in less surface disturbance, this alternative would require a larger pipe with greater compression (with resultant long-term air quality and noise impacts for the life of the project). While attractive in concept, we concluded that the "one-pipe" alternative would present a number of challenges and that melding the various factors and requirements (receipt points and pressures, delivery points and pressures, scheduling terms and conditions, etc.) of each individual system into a common system would be extremely difficult. Thus, we eliminated the one-pipe system alternative from further consideration.

We evaluated the differences in environmental impacts if the Piceance Project route followed the existing Uinta Basin Lateral between the Greasewood Hub and MP 105.1. WIC's proposed route along this 36.6-mile-long segment would only parallel existing utility ROWs for about 11.1 miles. To make use of the existing Uinta Basin Lateral ROW along this segment, we considered two route alternatives that also would follow the proposed Entrega Project route. We did not initially identify major construction constraints for these alternative routes. The Uinta Basin Lateral route alternatives for this segment appear to reduce environmental impacts compared to the proposed route because of: 1) equal or less overall surface disturbance; 2) less disturbance of sage grouse winter range (a locally important issue); 3) less disturbance in CDOW state wildlife areas; and 4) more miles parallel to existing pipelines. In its comments on the draft EIS, WIC provided additional information at our request regarding the rationale for selecting its proposed route from MP 105.1 to MP 141.7 over the Uinta Basin Lateral alternative and the constraints associated with collocating their pipeline with the Uinta Basin Lateral. Furthermore, we also conducted an over-flight of the proposed pipeline ROW and alternative routes since publication of the draft EIS. Based on the steep topography along the Uinta Basin Lateral in the Colorow Gulch area, the lack of workspace to install an additional pipeline where the best route alignment is already occupied by the Uinta Basin Lateral and the presence of highly erosive soils prone to undercutting and slumping in Indian Valley, we do not recommend the Uinta Basin Lateral alternatives. Furthermore, we also note that WIC's proposed route avoids the crossing of Piceance Creek and associated hay pastures in the Piceance Creek Valley that are very susceptible to subsidence, which has affected the flow irrigation in the fields along the Uinta Basin Lateral, and which required 2 to 3 years of post-construction mitigation following construction of the Uinta Basin Lateral.

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We also examined a collocation alternative north of MP 105.1 (within what we term the Danforth Hills North Study Area), where we evaluated the extent to which long-term disturbance of sage grouse habitat could be reduced by collocating the Entrega Project and Piceance Project in the same 150-foot-wide ROW. Along this segment, the proposed route and proposed Entrega Project route generally follow the Uinta Basin Lateral to Wamsutter. We estimated that about 264 fewer acres of sage grouse habitat (a 33 percent reduction) would be disturbed if the two proposed projects were collocated across 29 miles of sage grouse breeding and brooding habitat north of the Yampa River. There are a number of construction constraints in this area. Based on the engineering constraints associated with this alternative, including multiple pipeline crossings and pull-outs from the corridor, and difficult terrain at some wash crossings, we do not recommend use of the Collocation Alternative.

Conclusions

The conclusions and recommendations presented in this section are those of the FERC environmental staff. Our conclusions and recommendations were developed with input from the BLM as a cooperating agency; the BLM will use the final EIS in its Record of Decision for the Piceance Project.

Review of the information provided by WIC and further developed from responses to data requests; field investigations; scoping; literature research; alternatives analysis; and contacts with federal, state, and local agencies, and individual members of the public indicates that the proposed project would result in limited adverse environmental impact during construction and operation. We conclude that if the project is constructed and operated in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, WIC's proposed mitigation, and the additional mitigation recommendations presented below, the Piceance Project would be an environmentally acceptable action. Although many factors were considered in this determination, the principal reasons are:

- 82 percent of the proposed pipeline would be located adjacent to existing pipeline, utility, and road ROWs. Where WIC's proposed pipeline would parallel existing pipelines, it would generally be installed at a 40-foot offset from the nearest pipeline centerline;
- the project would be consistent with or in conformance with federal resource management plans;
- WIC would implement a number of resource- or activity-specific plans, procedures, and agreements to protect natural resources, avoid or limit environmental impact, and promote restoration of all disturbed areas during construction and operation of the project;
- the use of the HDD method would avoid disturbances to the beds and banks of the Little Snake, White, and Yampa Rivers;
- the appropriate consultations with the FWS, the SHPOs, the BLM, other affected land management agencies, and any appropriate pre-construction compliance actions resulting from these consultations, would be completed before WIC would be allowed to begin construction in any given area; and

- an environmental inspection program would be implemented to ensure compliance with all mitigation measures, Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (Certificate) conditions, and requirements contained in the POD.

In addition, we have developed specific mitigation measures to further reduce the environmental impacts that would otherwise result from construction of the project. The additional studies or field investigations, which we recommend, typically result in site-specific mitigation and further reduction of impacts; therefore, we are recommending that these mitigation measures be attached as conditions to any Certificate issued by the Commission.