

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The staff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission) has prepared this final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to fulfill requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The purpose of this document is to make public our analysis of the environmental impacts that would likely result from the construction and operation of the proposed Gulf Crossing Project (Project). This final EIS has been prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

PROJECT BACKGROUND

On November 17, 2006 Boardwalk Pipeline Partners, LP's, through its subsidiaries Gulf Crossing Pipeline Company LLC (Gulf Crossing) and Gulf South Pipeline, LP (Gulf South), filed a request with the Commission to implement its Pre-Filing Review Process for the Gulf Crossing Project. We¹ approved Gulf Crossing and Gulf South's (the Companies) request on November 30, 2006. On June 19, 2007 the Companies filed a joint application with the Commission pursuant to Section 7(c) of the Natural Gas Act and Part 157 of the Commission's regulations for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to construct, operate, and maintain an interstate natural gas pipeline and associated ancillary and aboveground facilities, collectively known as the Gulf Crossing Project (Project). On October 16, 2007 Gulf Crossing, under Docket Number CP07-398-001 filed an amendment to its application to modify two proposed compressor stations. We have prepared our analysis based on this application, coordination with local, state and other Federal agencies, written public comments, comments received at public meeting, information gathered at site visits, and subsequent filings by the Companies. A draft EIS was issued on November 2, 2007.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed Project is expected to transport up to approximately 1.73 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas from production fields in eastern Texas and southern Oklahoma to Gulf Coast market hubs that will service the eastern United States. Gulf Crossing proposes to construct and operate:

- approximately 356.3 miles of 42-inch-diameter natural gas transmission pipeline extending east-southeast from Grayson County, Texas and Bryan County, Oklahoma to Madison Parish, Louisiana;
- four new compressor stations totaling 100,734 horsepower (hp) of compression: the Sherman, Paris, Mira, and Sterlington Compressor Stations located in Grayson and Lamar County, Texas and Caddo and Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, respectively;
- seven new metering and regulating (M/R) stations; and
- other appurtenant ancillary facilities including, an interconnecting pipeline for one M/R station, mainline valves (MLV), pig² launcher and receiver facilities.

Gulf South proposes to construct and operate:

¹ "We", "us", and "our" refer to the environmental staff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Office of Energy Projects.

² A "pig" is a mechanical device used to clean or inspect the pipeline.

- approximately 17.8 miles of 42-inch-diameter pipeline loop (Mississippi Loop) extending southeast from Hinds County, Mississippi to Simpson County, Mississippi;
- addition of 30,000 hp to its recently approved Harrisville Compressor Station (Docket Number CP07-32-000); and
- other appurtenant ancillary facilities including MLV, pig launcher and receiver facilities.

Dependent upon Commission approval, the Companies propose to complete construction and begin operating the proposed Project in October 2008.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND COMMENTS

As part of our Pre-Filing review we issued a *Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, Request for Comments on Environmental Issues and Notice of Public Scoping Meetings* for the Gulf Crossing Project on April 2, 2007. On July 12, 2007 we issued a *Supplemental Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, Request for Comments on Environmental Issues and Notice of Public Site Visit* because of modifications in the Gulf South portion of the Project. These notices were published in the Federal Register (FR) and sent to: affected landowners; federal, state, and local government agencies; elected officials; environmental and public interest groups; Native American tribes; local libraries; newspapers; and other interested parties. In response to our notices, public site visits, and at several public meetings held along the proposed pipeline route, we received numerous comments from landowners, concerned citizens, public officials, and government agencies regarding the proposed Project. These comments expressed concerns with the location of the proposed pipeline and the effects of the proposed Project on numerous resources and land uses including: soils, waterbodies, wetlands, wildlife, vegetation, threatened and endangered species, safety, air quality, noise impacts, timber production, and state- and federally-managed lands.

We prepared a draft EIS and issued a Notice of Availability (NOA) that was published in the FR on November 9, 2007, establishing a 45-day comment period ending on December 24, 2007. During this period, we conducted public comment meetings in Rayville and Homer, Louisiana, and Atlanta, Paris, and Sherman, Texas on November 27, 28, 29, 2007 and December 3 and 4, 2007 respectively. During this period and at the public comment meetings we received numerous comments regarding the location of the proposed pipeline, and the affects to land use, and safety and reliability. Specifically, we received comment letters from the FWS, NRCS, TPWD, LDWF, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Geodetic Survey, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, and the Texas Historical Commission, as well as 16 potentially affected property owners or coalitions. Comments received during this period were considered and addressed in this final EIS. Submitted comments and our responses to those comments are provided in Appendix J³ of this document. All changes made to the draft EIS in response to comments, supplemental information and/or further analysis are indicated by vertical bars that appear in the margins of this final EIS.

This final EIS has been mailed to the agencies, individuals, and organizations on the distribution list found in Appendix A, and has been filed with the EPA for formal notice of availability.

³ Some Appendices are not included in the printed edition of the final EIS; refer to the enclosed CD-ROM

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

Construction and operation of the proposed Project would result in impacts to: soils, groundwater, surface water, wetlands, vegetation, wildlife, fisheries, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, air and noise quality, and land use.

The proposed Project would be located in a region with a low risk of seismic activity, soil liquefaction, and subsidence. Some portion of the proposed Project would traverse areas with a high risk of landslides; however, due to the limited extent of these areas and the proposed construction methods, no significant hazard to the pipeline or significant resources would be expected.

To minimize general construction-related effects to soils, the Companies would implement the measures described in their Plan, Procedures, and SPCC Plan. These measures would control erosion, and increase the potential success of revegetation efforts.

Construction of the proposed pipeline would temporarily affect 896 surface waterbodies. Conventional open-cut waterbody construction techniques, flume crossings, horizontal bores, or horizontal directional drills (HDD) would be used to complete all waterbody crossings. Most significant waterbodies are proposed or recommended to be crossed using the HDD method or an alternative dry crossing method (flume or horizontal bore), including: 16 of the 22 major waterbody crossings (six stock ponds would be open cut); all navigable waterbodies; designated two Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers; three Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI) listed streams; ecologically sensitive resource waters; fisheries of special concern; the rivers most likely to contain habitat for federally-listed fish species; and the majority of the impaired waterbodies that would be crossed by the proposed pipeline.

Construction of the proposed pipeline would affect 164 wetlands, disturbing approximately 144.3 acres. Special-status wetlands, including wetlands in the NRCS-administered Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and several high-quality forested wetlands would be temporarily and permanently affected by construction and operation of the proposed Project. The most significant impacts to wetlands resulting from construction and operation of the proposed Project would be the long-term and permanent conversion of forested wetlands.

The main vegetative communities that would be affected include agricultural land (1,964 acres, or 43 percent) and hardwood forests (1,810 acres, or 40 percent). Open land (477 acres, or 11 percent), and pine/pine plantation (286, or 6 percent) represent the other vegetation communities affected by construction. Several extensive forested tracts would also be crossed by the proposed pipeline route, as well as vegetative communities of special concern. The Companies would restore all disturbed vegetated areas in accordance with their Plan and Procedures. The Companies would finalize consultations with applicable state and federal agencies regarding seed mixtures and final restoration measures prior to construction.

Construction and operation of the proposed Project would not significantly affect wildlife and aquatic habitats. The clearing of wildlife habitats would affect wildlife at or near the time of construction, but such impacts would be temporary and many habitats would generally recover quickly following construction. The Companies would minimize impacts to wildlife habitats through collocation with existing rights-of-way to the extent practicable, the use of HDD crossing methods, and the implementation of measures described in their Plan and Procedures. The Companies would further reduce impacts to significant wildlife habitats, waterbirds, and migratory birds through consultation with applicable federal and state agencies, conduct pre-construction surveys, and develop a Migratory Bird Plan, all of which would be completed prior to construction.

Impacts on fisheries and aquatic habitats would result from increased sedimentation and turbidity, loss of cover, introduction of pollutants into the aquatic environment, and disruptions of fish movements. These impacts would be minimized through adherence with the Companies' Procedures, the use of HDD and dry crossing methods to cross fisheries of special concern, and the terms of any applicable federal or state permits.

In consultation with the FWS, we identified 15 federally-listed threatened and endangered species that could be affected by the proposed Project. Based on our review of these 15 species, we have determined that construction and operation of the proposed Project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect 11 federally-listed threatened and endangered species. We have also determined that construction and operation of the proposed Project would not affect the remaining four federally-listed threatened and endangered species. We are recommending that Gulf Crossing use qualified biologists to survey for interior least tern nesting habitat should construction occur within the nesting season. The FWS has concurred with our findings regarding the American burying beetle; however, FWS Tulsa requires additional information be filed with the survey report that was submitted. Therefore, we are recommending that information be filed with FWS prior to construction. Additionally, consultations with the TPWD regarding the Louisiana black bear are ongoing; and we are recommending that those consultations be completed prior to any construction.

Construction and operation of the proposed Project would temporarily and permanently affect several land uses, resulting in short- and long-term impacts to agricultural, forests, timber production, and special use areas. Consultation with the appropriate land-managing agencies is ongoing to minimize impacts on these areas. To minimize impacts to land uses, we have recommended that the Companies not utilize or maintain a permanent right-of-way greater than 50 feet in width and that the proposed pipeline overlap with existing rights-of-way in areas of collocation for at least 10 feet.

Visual resources along the proposed Project route would be affected by the installation of certain aboveground facilities and through the alteration of existing vegetative patterns associated with the clearing and maintenance of the construction and permanent pipeline rights-of-way. These impacts would be minimized by screening plans, where necessary, to minimize visual impacts; these plans would be finalized prior to construction.

The proposed Project would have positive impacts on local spending, employment, and tax income during construction and operation; however, these impacts would be relatively small. Construction of the proposed Project would not have a significant adverse impact on local populations, housing, employment, community services, or local commerce.

Cultural resources surveys are 97 percent complete. Surveys are currently being completed along 8.2 miles of recently proposed route variations and access roads. Access to the remaining 3.6 miles has been denied by the landowners. One Texas site is considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; however, the pipeline route has been rerouted to avoid impact to the site. Consultation with the State Historic and Preservation Offices (SHPOs) will be completed prior to any construction.

Operation of the proposed Project compressor stations would permanently affect both the air quality and noise environment near the compressor stations. However, we have determined that there would be no significant impacts due to air emissions from the compressor stations, nor from construction activities. We recommend restricting noise from the compressor stations and HDD activities to minimize noise impact for local residents.

Ancillary facilities would be used to support construction activities. These facilities account for 10 percent of the land used for the project and include contractor yards used primarily for equipment

storage; and pipe yards used to store sections of pipe prior to being installed. Approximately 63.5 percent of the area affected by pipe storage and contractor yards would consist of existing commercial or industrial uses, the remainder is agricultural or pasture land use. Following construction, all pipe storage and contractor yards would be returned to their pre-construction conditions or as specified by landowner agreement.

To minimize and mitigate the environmental impacts of constructing and operating the proposed Project, the Companies have developed and would implement several measures and plans, including but not limited to the following:

- Upland Erosion Control, Revegetation, and Maintenance Plan (Plan);
- Wetland and Waterbody Construction and Mitigation Procedures (Procedures);
- Exotic and Invasive Species Control Plan;
- Well Monitoring and Mitigation Plan;
- Plan for the Unanticipated Discovery of Contaminated Media;
- Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures Plan (SPCC Plan);
- Plan for the Containment of Inadvertent Release of Drilling Mud during Horizontal Directional Drilled Wetland and Waterbody Crossings (HDD Contingency Plan); and
- Plan for the Unanticipated Discovery of Historic Properties, Human Remains, or Potential Paleontological Evidence during Construction.

Detailed descriptions of environmental impacts including a description of cumulative impacts, the Companies' proposed impact avoidance and mitigation measures, and our recommendations to further minimize and mitigate impacts are included in Sections 2.0, 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0 of the Draft EIS.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

We evaluated the No Action Alternative, the Postponed Action Alternative, alternative energy sources, and the potential effects of energy conservation, system alternatives, route alternatives, route variations, and aboveground facility site alternatives to determine whether they would be technically and economically feasible and environmentally preferable to the proposed action. During the Pre-filing, scoping, and draft EIS comment periods, public and agency comments resulted in Gulf Crossing adopting 113 route variations. In our analysis, we considered the potential impacts to environmental resources and land uses. We also evaluated alternatives that would avoid or minimize impacts to environmental resources, such as wetlands and waterbodies, and land uses, such as timber production and state- and federally-managed lands. We recommend the adoption of three additional route variations that we believe would result in further environmental benefits compared to the proposed Project. No other alternatives evaluated were found to be environmentally preferable to the proposed Project.

CONCLUSION

As part of our review, we developed measures that we believe would appropriately and reasonably avoid, minimize, or mitigate environmental impacts associated with construction and operation of the proposed Project. We recommend that these measures be attached as conditions to any authorization issued by the Commission. We conclude that if the proposed Project is approved and is constructed and operated in accordance with the Companies' proposed minimization and mitigation

measures and our recommended mitigation measures; the proposed facilities would result in limited adverse environmental impacts. In support of this conclusion, we offer the following:

- the proposed Project would be collocated with existing utility rights-of-way for approximately 182.3 miles, or about 51 percent of the mainline route, as well as the entire 17.8 miles of the Mississippi Loop;
- the Companies would implement the Project Plan and Procedures and other plans, which would minimize and mitigate impacts to natural resources during construction and operation of the proposed Project;
- we recommend the limitation of the permanent rights-of-way to 50 feet wide; and to use portions of existing, natural gas pipeline permanent rights-of-way during construction, if feasible;
- we recommend that the Companies develop crossing plans for WRP lands and significant wetland areas containing mature trees and a wetland mitigation plan;
- the Companies would compensate for all unavoidable wetland impacts; and
- the Companies would implement an environmental inspection and monitoring program that would ensure compliance with all proposed and recommended mitigation measures.