

The vertical line in the margin identifies text that has been modified in the Final EIS and differs from the corresponding text in the Draft EIS.

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 East Texas to Mississippi Expansion Project (Project). This EIS has been prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

PROJECT BACKGROUND

On February 17, 2006, we¹ approved the Gulf South Pipeline Company, LP's (Gulf South) request to use the Commission's Pre-filing Review Process for the proposed East Texas Expansion Project. On April 13, 2006, we also approved Gulf South's request to use the Commission's Pre-filing Review Process for the proposed Mississippi Expansion Project. After reviewing these proposed projects, we decided to combine our pre-filing review of these projects and recommended to Gulf South that it combine the proposed East Texas and Mississippi Expansion Projects into one application to the Commission at the conclusion of the combined pre-filing review.

On September 1, 2006 Gulf South filed an 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 (Certificate) to construct, operate, and maintain an interstate natural gas pipeline and associated ancillary and aboveground facilities, collectively known as the East Texas to Mississippi Expansion Project. We have prepared our analysis based on this application and subsequent filings by Gulf South.

On February 9, 2007 we issued a Draft EIS for the proposed Project.

PROPOSED ACTION

In order to transport up to approximately 1.7 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas from production fields in eastern Texas to markets in the Gulf Coast, Midwestern, Northeastern, and Southeastern United States, Gulf South proposes to construct and operate approximately 243.6 miles of natural gas pipeline and associated ancillary facilities. Specifically, Gulf South proposes to construct and operate:

- approximately 240.3 miles of 42-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline extending easterly from DeSoto Parish, Louisiana to Simpson County, Mississippi;

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

- approximately 3.3 miles of 36-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline extending northward from Gulf South's existing Carthage Junction Compressor Station in Panola County, Texas to interconnect with existing natural gas facilities within Panola County;
- two new compressor stations, the Vixen and the Tallulah Compressor Stations, located in Ouachita and Madison Parishes, Louisiana, respectively;
- modifications to three existing compressor stations, the Carthage Junction, Hall Summit, and McComb Compressor Stations in Panola, County, Texas, Bienville Parish, Louisiana, and Walthall County, Mississippi, respectively; and
- other ancillary facilities, including six meter and regulator (M/R) facilities, eleven mainline valves, nine side valves, and five pig launcher and/or receiver facilities.

Dependent upon Commission approval, Gulf South proposes to complete construction and begin operating the proposed Project in September 2007.

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* for the East Texas Expansion Project on March 28, 2006 followed by a *Notice of Site Visit and Public Meetings to Receive Environmental Comments* on June 7, 2006. We also 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 Mississippi Expansion Project on May 23, 2006. 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, 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 affects of the proposed Project on numerous resources and land uses including soils, waterbodies, wetlands, wildlife, vegetation, threatened and endangered species, safety and reliability, 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 February 16, 2007, establishing a 45-day comment period ending on March 27, 2007. During this period, we conducted public comment meetings in Minden and Monroe, Louisiana, and Vicksburg, Mississippi on February 26 and 27 and March 1, 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, EPA, NPS, the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and three potentially affected property owners. Comments received during this period were considered and addressed in this final EIS. Submitted comments and our responses to those comments are provided in the Appendix K of this document. As noted above, all changes made to the Draft EIS in response to comments, supplemental information and/or further analysis are indicated by the vertical bars that appear in the margins of this document.

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

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.

Construction of the proposed pipeline would temporarily affect 889 surface waterbodies. Conventional open-cut waterbody construction techniques and horizontal directional drills (HDD) would be used to complete all waterbody crossings. Specifically, twenty-one major and/or navigable streams, two designated Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers (Black Lake Bayou and Saline Bayou), two Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI)-listed streams (the Big Black River and the Pearl River), the rivers most likely to contain habitat for federally-listed fish species (the Mississippi River, Red River, and Pearl River), and nine of the ten impaired waterbodies that occur along the proposed pipeline route would be crossed using HDDs.

Construction of the proposed pipeline would affect 309 wetlands, disturbing approximately 122.4 acres of wetlands. 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.

In consultation with the FWS, we identified ten federally-listed threatened and endangered species as well as one candidate species that could be affected by the proposed Project. Based on our review of these species, we have determined that construction and operation of the proposed Project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect federally-listed threatened and endangered species and that the candidate species would not be significantly affected by the proposed Project.

With the exception of recently proposed route modifications, aboveground facilities and additional temporary work spaces which are still under review by their respective state historical preservation offices, construction and operation of the proposed Project would not affect cultural resources.

Construction and operation of the proposed Project would temporarily and permanently affect several land uses, resulting in short- and long-term impacts to forests, timber production, and special interest areas. The proposed Project would cross or be located in the vicinity of several recreational and special interest areas including Conservation Reserve Program and WRP lands; the Ouachita Wildlife Management Area; the NRI-listed Pearl and Big Black Rivers; two Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers, Black Lake Bayou and Saline Bayou; the NPS-managed Natchez Trace Parkway; and the Tensas National Wildlife Refuge.

To minimize and mitigate the environmental impacts of constructing and operating the proposed Project, Gulf South has 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);
- Plan for the Unanticipated Discovery of Contaminated Media;
- Loess Soils Management Plan;

- Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures 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.

Based on our review of the measures described in Gulf South's proposed plans and Procedures, we have determined that they are acceptable and consistent with our guidance documents regarding erosion control and the mitigation of impacts to wetlands and waterbodies. In addition to the implementation of these measures and plans, Gulf South would obtain other federal, state, and local permits, and authorizations that would contain measures to further minimize and mitigate environmental impacts resulting from construction and operation of the proposed Project.

Detailed descriptions of environmental impacts including a description of cumulative impacts, Gulf South's 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 this document.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

We have evaluated the No Action Alternative, the Postponed Action Alternative, alternative energy sources, 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. In this 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. None of the alternatives evaluated offered significant environmental benefits when compared to the proposed Project with our recommended mitigation measures. As such, we are not recommending the adoption of any of the alternatives evaluated.

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 are recommending that these measures be attached as conditions to any authorization issued by the Commission. We conclude that if the proposed Project is found to be in the public interest and is constructed and operated in accordance with Gulf South's 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 185 miles, or about 77 percent of the proposed route;
- Gulf South would implement its plans and Procedures, which would minimize and mitigate impacts to natural resources during construction and operation of the proposed Project;
- We are recommending that Gulf South limit the width of its permanent right-of-way to 50 feet; to use portions of existing, natural gas pipeline permanent rights-of-way during construction, if feasible; and to limit the width of its construction right-of-way in areas requiring two-tone construction techniques to further reduce impacts;

- Gulf South has developed site-specific crossing plans for WRP lands and significant wetland areas containing mature cypress and water tupelo trees, a wetland mitigation plan, and would compensate for all unavoidable wetland impacts; and
- Gulf South would implement an environmental inspection and monitoring program that would ensure compliance with all proposed and recommended mitigation measures.