

NM Gas Co. preps for pipeline replacement ahead of approval

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As New Mexico Gas Co. awaits approval from the Bureau of Land Management to replace 6 miles of natural gas line through the Rio Grande Gorge, the company is getting its ducks in a row in order to complete the project during a tight, four-month window this fall.

New Mexico Gas Co. submitted a right of way application to the Bureau of Land Management in 2014 to reroute and replace the line between Rinconada and Pilar. The "Taos mainline," as it is called, is the only natural gas pipeline serving Taos County and currently runs through a geologically unstable area on the west side of the river, company officials say.

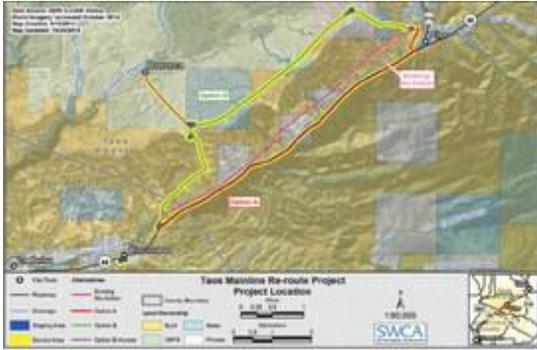
The project would replace the current 8-inch-diameter pipe with a larger 12-inch-diameter pipeline, move it from the west side of the Rio Grande to the shoulder of State Road 68 on the river's east side and eliminate two river crossings.

Brad Higdon, a BLM planning and environmental specialist, told *The Taos News* a final decision from the BLM is expected at the end of April. The BLM is incorporating responses and revisions that are the result of recent public comments made during the agency's required environmental assessment of the project.

Once the final decision is made, the gas company can secure necessary permits from the New Mexico Department of Transportation, according to Tim Korte, manager of communications with the company.

Meanwhile, the company is lining up contractors for surveying, construction, trucking and traffic control, while also engineering the specifics of the plan to maintain pressure in the gas lines running throughout Taos County during the project.

Korte said the project would cost about \$14 million, higher than previous estimates.



The proposed options that New Mexico Gas explored for rerouting the Taos mainline through the Rio Grande Gorge.

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