



Flathead National Forest

Media Release

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Natural Gas Pipeline Proposed on Flathead National Forest

The Flathead National Forest is requesting comments regarding an environmental impact statement (EIS) for a proposal by NorthWestern Energy to construct and operate a loop natural gas pipeline on the Hungry Horse Ranger District. The new loop pipeline would be installed underground, and generally parallel U.S. Highway 2 and an existing natural gas transmission pipeline currently authorized with a Forest Service special-use permit. The proposed project is referred to as *Kalispell Line Valve 5 to 6 Loop Natural Gas Pipeline Project*.

The proposal includes construction of approximately twelve miles of 12-inch diameter steel pipe from an existing natural gas valve station near Marias Pass on the Continental Divide westward to an existing natural gas valve station near the junction of Bear Creek and the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. Approximately 11 miles of the new pipeline would be on National Forest System land and approximately one mile on private lands in the Snowslip/Giefer Creek area.

The proposed project is to increase capacity and supply, and to maintain reliable natural gas service to the Kalispell and Flathead Valley area. NorthWestern Energy projects that the capacity of the existing 10-inch diameter pipeline, constructed in 1962, will be reached within two years due to the continuing strong population growth in the Flathead Valley area. The existing pipeline is the Flathead Valley's only source of natural gas. According to NorthWestern Energy, the demand for natural gas has increased in western Montana the last several years.

The proposed project would include construction of the new pipeline as close as feasibly and technically possible to the existing line, but may have to diverge in some locations due to terrain, railroad tracks, highway right-of-way , environmental concerns, other utilities, engineering needs, or other technical factors. A portion of the new pipeline may need to be constructed in an inventoried roadless area. NorthWestern Energy proposes construction of the loop pipeline during the summer of 2009.

Comments on this proposed project should be submitted in writing by July 31 to the District Ranger at the Hungry Horse Ranger District. It is anticipated that a draft environmental impact statement will be available for public review in October 2008. Visit www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead for scoping information and maps, or contact Project Manager David Ondov at (406) 758-5364 for more information.

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