

**Questions and Answers**  
**East Fork Slide**  
*November 5, 2008*

**Q. Where is the landslide located?**

A. The landslide is on the San Juan National Forest approximately 12 miles northeast of Pagosa Springs in Archuleta County. It is two miles east of US Highway 160 on the East Fork Road (NF System Road 667).

**Q. When and how was the situation discovered?**

A. The first indication of recent movement of the slide occurred on Friday evening, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, when a break in a buried Xcel Energy pipeline along the East Fork Road was detected through the remote gas-load control center in Golden, Colorado.

**Q. What does the pipeline contain?**

A. The pipeline is owned by Xcel Energy and is authorized on National Forest System lands by a special-use permit. A section of the 8-inch-diameter, natural-gas pipeline buried parallel to the East Fork Road sheared on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was repaired by Xcel crews on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. When a section in the same vicinity sheared again on May 4<sup>th</sup>, Xcel replaced the section of buried 8-inch pipe with a temporary 4-inch-diameter, above-ground pipe across the slide area.

**Q. Who does the pipeline serve?**

A. According to a representative from Xcel, the pipeline serves areas from the San Luis Valley to Vail, Colorado.

**Q. What is the size of the landslide?**

A. The active portion of the slide is approximately 600 feet wide, 3500 feet long, and affects approximately 40 acres of the National Forest.

**Q. How close is the landslide to the East Fork of the San Juan River?**

A. The toe (bottom) of the slide is at the edge of the river.

**Q. Could the river be blocked? If so, what are the impacts of that event?**

A. It is unlikely, but possible. The river eroded the slide as the material reached the river. The rate of slide movement was not fast enough to dam the river. In order for the slide to dam the river, conditions would have to change within the slide area to cause the speed of movement to increase dramatically. While this is possible, it is not typical for this type of slide. Even if the river was dammed, the canyon is very narrow, so the volume of water that might gather behind the dam would probably not be great.

**Q. Who is monitoring the situation?**

A. Representatives with the USDA Forest Service, Xcel, Colorado Geological Survey, Archuleta County Office of Emergency Management, Colorado Division of Emergency Management, and Colorado Division of Water Management are monitoring the slide.

**Q. Who is currently affected by the landslide?**

A. Currently, affected people include:

- Some Xcel customers who may experience service issues,
- Members of the recreating public who utilize the East Fork corridor,
- Grazing and outfitter/guide permittees (and their clients) in the East Fork corridor,
- Private property owners in areas upriver from the slide area.

If slide conditions change, affected parties may change.

**Q. Is this a new landslide?**

A. No, this is a large, old landslide. Aerial photos reveal that the area in question slid many years ago. The Xcel pipeline has been in place for 45 years and was first ruptured by this landslide in February, 2006.

**Q. Is this a unique situation?**

A. Although the landslide is a naturally occurring event, it is unique in that its movement is faster and has been persisting for a longer time period than other slides recently discovered on public lands in the Pagosa Springs area. Other slides that occurred on the Pagosa District this spring were on Jackson Mountain, West Fork, Mill Creek, Willow Draw, First Fork, and West Monument Roads. Slides have also occurred on Forest Service trails.

**Q. When was the landslide first detected and what was initially done?**

A. The Forest Service's original assessment on May 5 focused on working with Xcel Energy to restore utility services to customers throughout the state of Colorado. As the slide continued to move, the USFS notified Archuleta County Search and Rescue, who had downstream concerns. A joint press release was issued by the Forest Service, Pagosa Ranger District, and the Archuleta County Sheriff's Office on May 14, 2008. Additional joint press releases will be issued as needed in the future. The Forest Service and Archuleta County will continue to work together on this issue.

**Q. What is the current status of the landslide?**

The landslide has essentially stopped moving, however, it is unknown under what conditions the slide may begin moving again. Xcel Energy reinstalled the 8" gas pipeline above ground across the slide area and graded the slopes to allow water to drain off the slide area. The area of disturbed ground was seeded.

**Q. Is the area closed to the public?**

A. As of October 10, the East Fork Road (NFSR 667) is closed to motor vehicles greater than 50 inches wide between the closure gates immediately east of the East Fork Campground and just west of the Silver Falls Guard Station. The approximate length of the closure is five miles. The special road closure is necessary for the protection of public health and safety in response to the landslide and a washout on the road which has rendered the road too narrow for safe passage by full-sized vehicles.

**Q. Why do I see people driving full-sized vehicles on the road?**

A. A few people have permits to drive motor vehicles on the closed portion of the road for specific purposes. These people include Xcel Energy employees checking the pipeline, the Federal Highways Administration representatives collecting data to design a repair for the road, private landowners and contractors accessing private property, and permitted outfitter/guides that have operations in that area. The permits contain restrictions on the purposes for which they can use the road and requirements to limit damage to the road. Descriptions of vehicles and license plate numbers of vehicles that seem out of place may be reported to the Pagosa Public Lands Office.

**Q. When will the road be opened?**

A. The road will soon be closed for the winter to all motorized vehicles with the exception of snowmobiles operating on snow. It is currently unknown when the road will be re-opened to motor vehicles.

**Q. How is the East Fork Campground affected?**

A. The East Fork Campground was not affected. Xcel, in partnership with the Forest Service installed a gate which closes the road beyond the campground entrance. The campground is operated by a concessionaire authorized by a Special Use Permit. The campground is currently closed for the winter.

**Q. What National Forest trails are affected?**

A. Access to Quartz Ridge (570), Quartz Creek (571), Silver Creek (567), Treasure Mountain (565), Sand Creek (570), and Coal Creek (581) Trails is limited by one's ability to reach the trailheads via non-motorized means or using motor vehicles less than 50 inches wide. A portion of the Coal Creek Trail (581) was damaged by the landslide.

**Q. Who can I call for more information?**

A. You may contact the Pagosa Public Lands Office and/or the San Public Lands Center for additional information.

**Q. Where can I view photos of the landslide?**

A. Photos are posted on the San Juan National Forest web site. Photos can also be viewed at the Pagosa Public Lands Office.

**Q. Is the situation dangerous?**

A. The road restrictions are in effect for public health and safety. It is unknown under what conditions the slide may begin moving again. The route across the slide area is native surface (not graveled) and is slippery when wet. Deep cracks in the surface throughout the slide are present, as are numerous leaning trees. Public land users have the responsibility to be aware of the potential risks and take safety precautions at all times when visiting public lands. Changing terrain, forest, and weather conditions present a wide variety of hazards.

**Q. Can I enter the East Fork valley over Elwood Pass?**

A. Yes, *conditions allowing*. Access over Elwood Pass from the Rio Grande National Forest to the gate just west of the Silver Falls Guard Station is not restricted; however the road will likely soon be closed by snow.