

Gas pipeline gets feds' OK

By MEAD GRUVER - Associated Press writer | Posted: Wednesday, July 14, 2010

CHEYENNE -- A \$3 billion gas pipeline from Wyoming to Oregon has cleared its last major regulatory hurdle, and its builder is optimistic that work could begin soon.

El Paso Corp. has begun staging equipment and pipe sections near the 675-mile route, company spokesman Richard Wheatley said Tuesday. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management approved and granted rights-of-way for the project Monday.

"We can mobilize workers and work camps to begin clearing and grading operations as soon as we get final regulatory approval," Wheatley said. "We're in good shape."

Houston-based El Paso expects final Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approval within days, he said, and construction would begin soon after.

The pipeline will begin in western Wyoming and cross northern Utah and Nevada before ending at Malin, Ore. Up to 5,000 workers will work on the project at Opal, which will begin in seven locations along the pipeline route.

El Paso expects the pipeline, which will be 42 inches wide, to become operational in March 2011. In comparison, the 800-mile-long oil pipeline in Alaska is only six inches larger in diameter.

The BLM decision required approval from other federal agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The federal government is awaiting agreements from state historic preservation offices in the four states, but that too is expected soon. The agreements help ensure the project doesn't unnecessarily disrupt archaeological and other important cultural sites.

"It's just a matter of putting the documents together and sending them out for a signature. We're almost there," said Mark Mackiewicz, project manager for the BLM.

Environmentalists, including the Hailey, Idaho-based Western Watersheds Project, say the route crosses too many undeveloped lands when the pipeline could be built along highways and other developed corridors.