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Group sues over Wyoming-to-Oregon gas pipeline

By Mead Gruver

Associated Press Writer

CHEYENNE, Wyo. -- An environmental group that wants to block construction of a \$3 billion gas pipeline from Wyoming to Oregon filed a lawsuit Friday, saying the pipeline will cut across pristine land and harm endangered fish.

The Tucson, Ariz.-based Center for Biological Diversity sued the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in federal court in San Francisco.

The Ruby Pipeline will cross more than 1,000 rivers and streams, harming species such as the Lahontan cutthroat trout, Warner Creek sucker, Lost River sucker and Colorado pikeminnow, said Noah Greenwald, endangered species coordinator for the group.

"More broadly, we don't understand why they had to choose to put a new pipeline through some of the most pristine lands in the West," he said. "Why couldn't they use an existing pipeline route?"

If construction begins, Greenwald said, the Center for Biological Diversity intends to seek an injunction to halt work until the group's concerns are addressed.

Work appears set to begin soon. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a notice to proceed Friday, said Mark Mackiewicz, manager of the project for the BLM.

"I imagine by Monday you'll have hundreds of people out there starting to work on this," Mackiewicz said.

He said the BLM and Ruby Pipeline LLC, a subsidiary of El Paso Corp., worked hard to address environmental concerns. El Paso

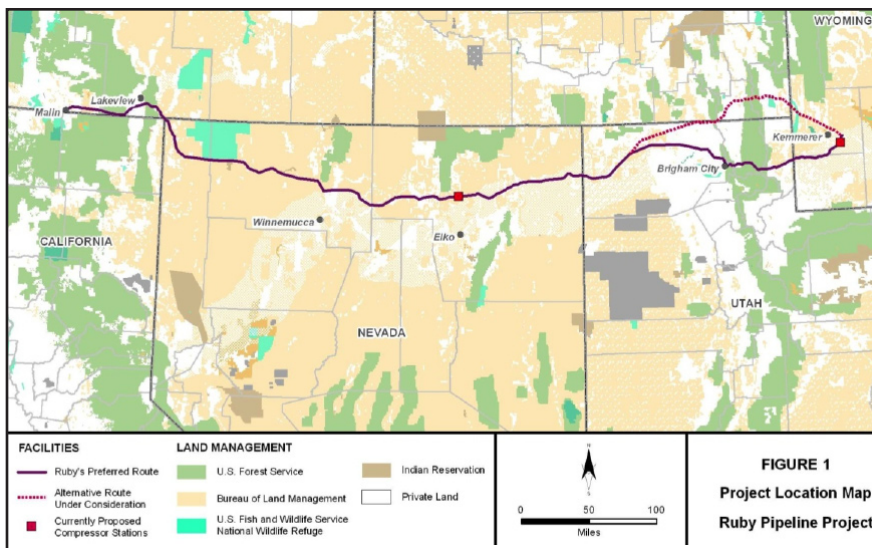
spokesman Richard Wheatley declined to comment.

Two other environmental groups, the Western Watersheds Project and Oregon Natural Desert Foundation, recently dropped opposition to the pipeline after El Paso agreed to spend \$20 million to help protect sagebrush habitat.

The Ruby Pipeline will begin at Opal in western Wyoming and cross northern Utah and Nevada before ending at Malin, Ore., near the California state line. Work on the project would begin at seven locations along the pipeline route.

The 42-inch-diameter pipeline will be among North America's largest, approaching the size of the 48-inch, 800-mile-long Trans Alaska oil pipeline.

El Paso expects the Ruby Pipeline to become operational in March 2011.



Pipes being prepared in Nevada for the Ruby Pipeline. (Adella Harding/Elko Daily Free Press)