

July 29, 2011, Adella Harding, Staff Writer, *Elko Daily Free Press*

Ruby Pipeline flowing Natural gas goes through Elko County

ELKO — El Paso Corp. on Thursday put the Ruby Pipeline in service so natural gas is now flowing from Wyoming to Oregon along a 680-mile route that goes through Elko County.

“Ruby is across the finish line, completing more than three and a half years of stakeholder outreach and construction,” said Jim Cleary, president of El Paso’s Western Pipelines. “During its construction, Ruby generated thousands of jobs and provided significant revenues for local communities, as well as county and state governments.”

Many of the pipeline workers stayed in Elko, bringing revenue to the community. The \$55 million Wieland Flat pipeline compressor station 32 miles north of Elko has 16 permanent employees, and houses the Ruby area office that covers the entire pipeline.

“I think it’s great. It’s a great project and we supported the project from the beginning,” Elko County Commission Chairman Demar Dahl said Thursday.

“The Ruby Pipeline was a job-creating machine. There were more than 5,100 workers at the peak, and there were multiplier effects with goods and services,” said El Paso spokesman Richard Wheatley.

Cleary said the pipeline “will continue to deliver long-term economic and environmental benefits by providing clean-burning natural gas supplies from the major Rocky Mountain basins to consumers in California, Nevada and the Pacific Northwest.”

The \$3.65 billion project went into service Thursday following Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approval on Wednesday, giving El Paso the final go-ahead.

FERC stated in its order Wednesday that restoration isn’t yet complete on the pipeline route, but “the right of way is sufficiently stabilized and final clean-up work is proceeding satisfactorily.”

FERC stated that Ruby must file weekly reports with the agency until the right of way is adequately reclaimed.

Although Elko County supported the project, commissioners fought El Paso Corp. over a \$22 million trust the company set up with Western Watersheds Project and the Oregon Natural Desert Association because of concerns Western Watersheds would attempt to retire grazing rights for ranchers with trust money.



Additionally, several other environmental organizations, including the Center for Biological Diversity, the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club, Great Basin Resource Watch and Defenders of Wildlife, filed actions against the project, as did the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe.

“We survived numerous challenges,” Wheatley said.

The trust controversy led to formation of a coalition of counties along the pipeline route, but Dahl said the coalition isn’t active now.

El Paso Corp. formed the trusts in exchange for the organizations dropping their opposition to the Ruby Pipeline.

“One of the good things that happened on the payoff to WWP was that our opposition and the opposition of nearly all the counties shined a light on the Equal Access to Justice Act, and we got a six-month moratorium,” Dahl said.

The opposition to the act providing tax dollars for environmental organizations to sue the government or file lawsuits against projects also led to a legislative proposal pending in Congress that would make it clear the act “will only be used for those who deserve it,” he said.

El Paso Corp. offered a \$15 million endowment to the Public Lands Council, which represents ranchers, to counter its decision to set up the conservation trust for Western Watersheds.

Meghan Brown, executive director of the Nevada Cattlemen’s Association, said Thursday that as far as she knows the Public Lands Council still hasn’t finalized an agreement on that trust. The Public Lands Council office in Washington, D.C., didn’t return a call by deadline.

El Paso Corp. also reported Global Infrastructure Partners has invested \$700 million in the Ruby project and will increase its equity interest in the project to 50 percent, after meeting certain requirements.