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From: Rachel Jankowitz, Conservation Chair (NPSNMconservation@gmail.com)  
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Re: Saddle Butte San Juan Midstream Piñon Pipeline scoping comments  
Project Serial Number NMNM133052

Date: December 30, 2014

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Native Plant Society of New Mexico (NPSNM), a non-profit organization that strives to educate the public about native plants by promoting knowledge of plant identification, ecology, and uses; foster plant conservation and the preservation of natural habitats; support botanical research; and encourage the appropriate use of native plants to conserve water, land, and wildlife. We have approximately 800 members in 8 chapters located throughout New Mexico and including El Paso, Texas and southwestern Colorado. We are responding to your scoping letter dated November 17, 2014.

The Piñon pipeline would require a right-of-way grant from the BLM, for approximately 130 miles of gathering and transport pipelines to gather produced crude oil from the Lybrook area and transport it to a rail facility where the product can ultimately reach market. The total right-of-way is 75 feet wide including 40 feet of permanent and 35 feet of temporary work space. Saddle Butte would construct and operate approximately 50 miles of 6-to 8-inch-diameter crude oil gathering pipeline and 80 miles of 10-to 12-inch-diameter crude oil transport pipeline from the proposed Lybrook Terminal facility in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico, to a point along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line in McKinley County, near the city of Milan, New Mexico. The pipeline route would cross portions of San Juan, Rio Arriba, Sandoval and McKinley Counties.

The scoping letter included no information about the size, structure or operations of the proposed terminal facility. The facility should be analyzed along with the pipeline, as they are connected and dependent actions. The Environmental Assessment should address the off-site impact of increased train traffic as compared to the current or projected level of truck traffic that would be supplanted, as well as stipulations that will be required regarding crude oil spill control and response.

The Piñon Pipeline has potential to adversely affect two special status species of native plants. The Brack hardwall cactus (*Sclerocactus cloverae* ssp. *brackii*) flowers in May. Its habitat is sandy clay strata of the Nacimiento Formation in sparse shadscale scrub, at 1,500-1,950 m (5,000-6,400 ft) elevation. The status of Brack hardwall cactus is NM State Endangered, BLM Sensitive, and Navajo Gp4 (insufficient information but may warrant listing). The proposed pipeline route appears to run directly through the very limited range of this species. The other special status species with potential to occur on the project site is Aztec gilia (*Aliciella formosa*), which flowers in April and May. Its habitat is salt desert scrub

communities in soils of the Nacimiento Formation, at 1,500-1,950 m (5,000-6,400 ft). The status of Aztec gilia is also NM State Endangered, BLM Sensitive, and Navajo Gp4. These two species often co-occur.

The precise distribution of rare plants in NM is poorly understood. Prior to deciding on a pipeline alignment, please conduct thorough surveys for both special status species during the appropriate time of year. Surveys should cover the 75' right-of-way, any staging areas, and a sufficient surrounding affected buffer area. A buffer around the directly affected footprint is necessary because native plants (and other ecological resources) can be affected by related factors such as dust, dust control practices, compaction, competition from weeds, altered drainage and habitat fragmentation. **Based on field survey results, it may be appropriate to consider an additional Alternative route which better avoids disturbance of these plants.** Please do not allow transplantation as a mitigating practice. Monitoring results from experimental transplants of Bracks hardwall cactus are not yet conclusive in demonstrating transplantation success. Unless and until success is conclusively demonstrated, the procedure should be considered an experiment in progress and not accepted as impact mitigation. The Aztec gilia transplants poorly and is difficult to grow from seed. The Environmental Assessment should also include an analysis of the potential effects of fragmentation on these restricted populations.

Linear corridors of disturbance provide the opportunity for the spread of noxious weeds. In northwest NM, field observations have confirmed the spread of weeds, especially halogeton, along pipeline rights-of-way. Impact minimization includes conducting pre-construction weed surveys, control of existing weed infestations that might be spread by the project (pre-emergence 2,4-D, along with physical control, can work for halogeton), a post-construction monitoring program, and post-construction establishment of a healthy native plant cover.

Pipeline rights-of-way should stipulate strong revegetation standards, using native seed at a rate of approximately 40 PLS/sf. Blue grama, galleta, Indian ricegrass, Western wheatgrass, and a dropseed are examples of species that may be appropriate for the project area, but the mix should be based on the surrounding native plant community. Reclamation should include a requirement to use mulch and/or a soil-moisture amendment such as Biosol, decompaction as needed prior to seeding, and timing of seeding to maximize potential for precipitation. Most important, continue revegetation efforts until pre-determined quantitative success criteria are achieved.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the scope of the Environmental Assessment for the Saddle Butte Piñon Pipeline. We have a few procedural comments and requests. Please advise us as to the best method to get on a mailing list for timely notice of BLM planning efforts and public meetings. NPSNM requests an opportunity to review a draft version of this EA, in particular the results of special status species surveys. The BLM should work in close consultation with the Endangered Plant Program Coordinator in the State Forestry Division of NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, when considering any projects which may significantly affect state-listed plants. In addition, we respectfully request that in the future BLM kindly avoid comment periods of which a substantial portion spans the second half of December.

Rachel Jankowitz, Conservation Chair  
Native Plant Society of New Mexico

