

Appendix F

Public Scoping Letter



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056



IN REPLY REFER TO:

October 18, 2007

<<Name
Title
Organization
Address
City, State Zip>>

Dear Interested Party:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is gathering information to assist with preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) regarding the potential issuance of a 50-year Incidental Take Permit (ITP) to NiSource Inc. (NiSource), including Service approval of NiSource's associated Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have agreed to serve as cooperating agencies on this EIS.

The *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) requires full public disclosure and analysis of environmental impacts of a proposed federal action—which in this case is the potential issuance of an ITP. Under NEPA, one of the first steps a federal agency must take is soliciting input from interested parties regarding the scope of the EIS.

By way of this letter, the Service is seeking your input as part of this scoping process. Comments might include reasonable alternatives, mitigation measures, probable significant adverse impacts, and licenses or other approvals that may be required. All comments received will be given equal consideration as part of the scoping process. A scoping report will be prepared after the comment period has ended and will be available on the project website approximately 30 days following the end of the formal comment period. The project website is located at: http://www.fws.gov/midwest/Endangered/permits/hcp/hcp_nisource.html.

We are also asking, by way of this letter, federal, state, tribal, and local agencies with jurisdiction and/or special expertise with respect to environmental issues (in addition to those agencies noted above) to formally cooperate with us in preparation of the EIS. Agencies that would like to request cooperating agency status on this EIS should follow the instructions for submitting comments provided below.

The ITP would be issued to NiSource under Section 10(1)(a)(B) of the *Endangered Species Act* (1973), as amended, specific to their interstate natural gas transmission activities in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, New Hampshire, Maine, Maryland and Massachusetts. The ITP would potentially include multiple federally listed species, and cover NiSource operations, maintenance and construction activities conducted by their interstate natural gas transmission subsidiaries: Columbia Gas Transmission Corporation, Columbia Gulf Transmission Corporation, Granite State Gas Transmission Corporation, and Crossroads Pipeline Corporation. The "project area" is defined as a 1-mile-wide corridor centered upon the location of NiSource's existing facilities.

Thirteen initial scoping meetings have been scheduled from November 5 to 15, 2007 to receive public comments. The meeting times and locations are provided on the enclosed *NiSource HCP NEPA Scoping Meetings – Venues for Open Houses* document.

Those wishing to submit comments are encouraged to do so by December 8, 2007, by any one of the following methods:

- U.S. Postal Mail – Comments should be sent to:
Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Ecological Services
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling, Minnesota 55111-4056
- Facsimile: 612-713-5292
- Website: http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/permits/hcp/nisource/hcp_eis.html

For further information, please contact:

Mr. Thomas Magnuson at 612-713-5467 or tom_magnuson@fws.gov, or
Mr. Forest Clark at 812-334-4261 ext. 206 or forest_clark@fws.gov

Additional recorded information is available by calling 1-800-247-1247 ext. 3100.

Persons needing reasonable accommodations in order to attend and participate in the public meetings should contact the Service at the address or phone numbers listed above no later than one week before the public meeting. Information regarding this proposed action is available in alternative formats upon request.

The Service's practice is to make comments, including names, home addresses, home phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their names and/or home addresses, etc., but if you wish us to consider withholding this information you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. In addition, you must present a rationale for withholding this information. This rationale must demonstrate that disclosure would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy. Unsupported assertions will not meet this burden. In the absence of exceptional, documentable circumstances, this information will be released. We will always make submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

The Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The Service enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the *Endangered Species Act*, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance Program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.