



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Coconino  
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Supervisor's Office

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**File Code:** 1950-1/2720-1

**Date:** June 4, 2004

Dear Friend:

The Coconino National Forest through the Red Rock Ranger District proposes to issue a permit to Unisource Energy Services for construction, operation and maintenance of a natural gas line in the general vicinity of State Route 179 (SR 179) between the Village of Oak Creek and Back-o-Beyond Road in Sedona. This letter and the enclosed summary are being sent to you because you have expressed interest in the project in the past.

The Forest Service has been actively working with Unisource and their consultants on the development of an environment analysis that describes the potential impacts of three alternatives plus a No-Action alternative. Unisource's proposal to install a new gas line is based on the need to increase and improve the certainty of natural gas supply and service to the greater Sedona area.

We have also been active in ADOT's (Arizona Department of Transportation) SR179 planning process. In both of these planning processes, residents of the community have strongly expressed the view that the gas line project should be carefully coordinated with improvements to SR 179, and vice versa, to reflect concerns about scenic resources and the natural setting. We agree.

In addition, the Forest Service also needs to be responsive to the President's National Energy Plan that calls for facilitating the development and construction of energy resources for public use. In this context, Unisource indicates that any further delay in implementing this project could result in service interruptions to existing customers this upcoming heating season. Unisource is a state-regulated utility. For Unisource, construction of this pipeline connection is critical to providing reliable services to their customers without interruption as required by State of Arizona regulations.

The Red Rock District Ranger and his staff have coordinated with ADOT and Unisource to determine how best to respond to the concerns. We are providing the enclosed analysis summary that describes the effects of proposed gas line alternatives for your review and comment.

At this time, we believe that the Purple Alternative, which places the gas line in the new southbound road corridor as recently determined through the SR 179 Needs-Based Implementation Process, is the best alternative for all involved. This alternative provides the most opportunity to have construction impacts for both the gas line construction and the highway construction coordinated to minimize impacts to both the scenery resources and the traveling public along the existing highway. All of the alternatives considered have drawbacks, on valued



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trails and along the highway itself. We know that construction of a gas line will have impacts, but given the careful coordination that already has occurred, and with continuing careful coordination with ADOT and their designers, we believe the gas line construction in this new road alignment can be better coordinated with future roadway construction to minimize all impacts than with all other alternatives.

The enclosed summary describes impacts of all alternatives and the trade offs between these alternatives. A draft Environmental Assessment on the Natural Gas Pipeline SR 179 (Village of Oak Creek to Sedona) will be available upon request or by accessing the Coconino National Forest website at: [www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/nepa](http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/nepa) for anyone interested in the more specific analysis of alternatives. This document will be finalized after the 30-day comment period and before a final decision is made on which alternative to select. A public meeting is also planned for Wednesday, June 23 at the Church of the Red Rocks, 54 Bowstring Drive, Sedona from 3pm to 7pm to share information about the analysis. Staff from the Forest Service, Unisource, and the environmental consulting team will be present to answer questions about this project.

### **Request for Comments**

At this time, we are asking for your comments on this project. Your comments are important to us. We would like to know of any issues or concerns you may have about this proposal. When you respond, please make sure your comments are fully formed and specific as possible to assist us in the analysis.

Please send your comments to Judy Adams, Red Rock Ranger District, PO Box 300, Sedona, AZ 86339, 928-527-3740 or Ken Anderson 928-203-7501, or email: [comments-southwestern-coconino-redrock@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-coconino-redrock@fs.fed.us).

This is considered the official Notice and Comment period for this project, per 36 CFR Part 215.3(a). If we do not receive any substantive comments or if we receive only supportive comments, there will be no appeal period following the completion of the EA and my subsequent decision (36 CFR 215.12(1)). Public comments (written, oral, facsimile, hand-delivered or electronic) on the Proposed Action will be accepted for 30 days following the date of publication of a Notice of Availability in the Arizona Daily Sun. Regulations prohibit extending the length of this comment period.

Thank you for your time and interest in your National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Joseph P. Stringer (for)  
NORA B. RASURE  
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure (1)