

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Before Commissioners: Pat Wood, III, Chairman;
William L. Massey, and Nora Mead Brownell.

Northwest Pipeline Corporation

Docket Nos. CP02-4-005
and CP02-4-006

ORDER AMENDING CERTIFICATE

(Issued September 15, 2003)

1. On June 27, 2002, the Commission issued an order granting Northwest Pipeline Corporation (Northwest) abandonment approval and certificate authorization, pursuant to Sections 7(b) and (c) of the Natural Gas Act, respectively, for its Evergreen Expansion Project.¹ The expansion project will loop several sections of Northwest's existing mainlines and add compression in order to enhance Northwest's capability to move gas through the capacity constrained sections of its system between Sumas and Chehalis, and between Washougal and Plymouth, in the state of Washington.

2. Northwest filed an application to amend its certificate to make minor modifications to certain of its previously authorized expansion facilities.² As discussed below, we find that Northwest's proposed modifications will not alter the Evergreen

¹99 FERC ¶ 61,365 (2002). On May 7, 2003, the Commission issued an order amending Northwest's June 2002 authorization to: (1) alter the originally certificated compression facilities, located in Skagit, Klickitat, Lewis, and Skamania Counties, Washington, in accordance with changed design considerations; (2) abandon certain existing compression facilities located in Skagit County, Washington; (3) modify the depth of installation of a portion of pipe at a road crossing in Pierce County, Washington; and (4) revise the initial rates for the project to comply with conditions of the prior orders in this proceeding. 103 FERC ¶ 61,149 (2003). On July 7, 2003, the Commission issued an order granting rehearing regarding aspects of the accounting treatment of the project's costs. 104 FERC ¶ 61,007 (2003).

²On July 14, 2003, Northwest filed an Application to Amend Certificate, and on August 8, 2003, filed an amendment to its July 14, 2003 application.

Expansion Project's originally certificated capacity, will not adversely impact the environment, and will not materially affect the project's total cost. Accordingly, we find Northwest's proposal is required by the public convenience and necessity and grant the requested amended authorization.

Northwest's Request to Modify its Expansion Facilities

3. At its existing Sumas Compressor Station in Whatcom County, Washington, Northwest is authorized to replace pistons on two reciprocating compressor units with smaller pistons and to install three acoustic sound walls. Northwest now proposes to leave the existing pistons in place on one unit, stating that this will maximize operational flexibility without altering the certificated capacity of its project. In addition, Northwest proposes to forego the installation of two of three certificated sound walls, contending that a single wall will be sufficient to ensure that its Sumas Compressor Station complies with the applicable noise standards. Finally, Northwest explains that certificate authorization providing for stubbed-off valve assemblies on the Covington and Auburn Loops to facilitate future tie-ins to the South Seattle and North Tacoma Laterals, respectively, is not necessary, as these lateral lines are already tied into both Northwest's mainline and loop line.

Notice of Northwest's Request to Amend its Expansion Project Certificate Authorization

4. Notices of Northwest's Docket No. CP02-4-005 request to amend its certificate authorization, as modified by Northwest's Docket No. CP02-4-006 filing, were published in the Federal Register on July 31, 2003³ and August 20, 2003,⁴ respectively. No motions to intervene or comments were filed in response.

Discussion

5. In view of Northwest's reassessment of the design and operation of its two compressor units, we will authorize Northwest to omit the initially authorized piston replacement for one unit. Further, in view of Northwest's updated noise study,⁵ we find that provided Northwest is able to meet all noise standard requirements, we will permit

³ 68 Fed. Reg. 44,935.

⁴ 68 Fed. Reg. 50,130.

⁵ See Northwest's Application to Amend Certificate, Exhibit F-1, Attachment B (July 14, 2003).

operation of the compressor station with a single sound wall, as Northwest requests, rather than three walls, as was initially specified. We accept Northwest's rationale for eliminating the Covington and Auburn Loop valve assemblies, and note that loop-to-lateral tie-ins, if needed at a later date, can be added at that later date.

6. We conclude that there will be no significant environmental impacts resulting from the modifications to the Sumas Compressor Station. The elimination of the sound walls and valve assemblies will decrease the amount of overall ground disturbance for the Evergreen Expansion Project. Although the elimination of two of the three proposed sound walls at the Sumas Compressor Station will have the impact of increasing the noise at the noise sensitive areas (NSAs) nearest the sound walls, Northwest has shown with computer modeling that the resulting noise at the NSAs should remain significantly below the day-night sound level (L_{dn}) of 55 decibels on the A-weighted scale (dBA) threshold. Notwithstanding the project modifications authorized herein, Northwest must comply with Environmental Condition No. 21 of our June 27, 2002 Order, based on the new predicted sound levels set forth in Northwest's April 2003 Final Acoustic Design Report,⁶ and with all other environmental and noise conditions specified in our June 27, 2002 and May 7, 2003 orders.

7. Estimated Evergreen Expansion Project costs, as currently certificated, are \$42,080,000 in rolled-in costs and \$198,825,000 in incremental costs. The costs to be saved by the reduced scope of construction are relatively small -- approximately \$100,000 in rolled-in costs and \$110,000 in incremental costs. Thus, we do not believe that the modifications to the certificated facilities authorized herein merit the revision of these estimated project costs. We note that Northwest has incurred unanticipated increases in actual costs on other components of the project that it expects will fully offset the cost savings from eliminating the facilities specified above.⁷

8. In our June 27, 2002 Order, as amended May 7, 2003, we authorized Northwest's Evergreen Expansion Project, finding it to be consistent with our 1999 Statement of Policy on the Certification of New Interstate Natural Gas Pipeline Facilities⁸ and required by the public convenience and necessity. Northwest now proposes to forego construction

⁶ See Northwest's Application to Amend Certificate, Exhibit F-1, Supplemental Environmental Report (July 14, 2003).

⁷ See Northwest's Data Response of August 8, 2003.

⁸ 88 FERC ¶ 61,227 (1999), order clarifying statement of policy, 90 FERC ¶ 61,128 (2000) and order further clarifying statement of policy, 92 FERC ¶ 61,094 (2000).

of certain originally certificated facilities, which will not alter the originally certificated capacity of the project and which may result in a lower project cost. The relatively minor modifications that Northwest proposes will not significantly change the scope or nature of the originally certificated project.⁹ Consequently, we find no cause to reconsider our previous findings in favor of the project and will therefore grant Northwest's requested certificate amendment.

The Commission orders:

(A) Northwest's certificate of public convenience and necessity, issued on June 27, 2002, as amended on May 7, 2003, is further amended, as described and conditioned herein and in our prior orders in this proceeding, and as more fully described in Northwest's applications of July 14, 2003 and August 8, 2003.

(B) Northwest shall comply with all applicable Commission regulations under the Natural Gas Act, particularly the conditions set forth in paragraphs (a) and (e) of Section 157.20 of the Commission's regulations.

(C) All conditions in the June 27, 2002 and May 7, 2003 orders pertaining to the Sumas Compressor Station and the Covington and Auburn Loops remain in effect.

By the Commission.

(S E A L)

Magalie R. Salas,
Secretary.

⁹ We note that the proposed amendment is unopposed and also note that the proposed amendment does not call into question our prior finding that existing customers will not subsidize expansion costs.