

## **WESTERN WATERSHEDS PROJECT, OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION AND RUBY PIPELINE AGREE TO ESTABLISH CONSERVATION FUNDS**

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Two agreements to fund core sagebrush habitat protection will address potential environmental impacts arising from the construction of a 680-mile natural gas pipeline from Wyoming to Oregon. In an unprecedented partnership between the nation's leading interstate natural gas pipeline company and conservation organizations, El Paso Corporation's Ruby Pipeline, LLC (Ruby) will donate over \$20 million during the next 10 years in cooperation with Western Watersheds Project (WWP) and the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) to set up two conservation funds to preserve lands and wildlife habitat near the pipeline's route.

Ruby and WWP have established a Sagebrush Habitat Conservation Fund, which will protect and restore sagebrush habitats by purchasing and retiring federal grazing permits offered by willing sellers to benefit native fish and wildlife, including sage grouse and pygmy rabbit. This Fund may also acquire private lands and conservation easements to protect these species.

ONDA and Ruby have set up a Greater Hart-Sheldon Conservation Fund, which will preserve the high desert sagebrush-steppe ecosystem encompassing the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in southeastern Oregon and the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Nevada. This Fund will promote restoration activities, including spring restoration, fence removal, weed control, land acquisition, and grazing permit retirement. Ultimately, both funds will restore core sagebrush landscapes and the species that depend on them.

"We are pleased to join with WWP and ONDA in protecting and enhancing this valuable sagebrush-steppe ecosystem," said Jim Cleary, President of El Paso Corporation's Western Pipeline Group. "These partnerships reflect El Paso Corporation's industry-leading commitment to environmental stewardship and to this end represent a significant component of the unprecedented voluntary mitigation efforts being applied to Ruby's construction and operation."

"The creation of the Sagebrush Habitat Conservation Fund is an innovative collaborative effort to restore sagebrush landscapes across the American West," said Jon Marvel, Executive Director

of Western Watershed Project. “Western Watersheds Project welcomes this opportunity to assist in the restoration of our shared western landscapes.”

“Protecting the area around the Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges is critical to ensuring the survival of high desert species like sage-grouse and pronghorn antelope,” said Brent Fenty, ONDA’s executive director. “Establishing the Greater Hart-Sheldon Conservation Fund will create restoration and conservation opportunities on critical habitat spanning over 5 million acres.”

Ruby, Western Watersheds and ONDA see the creation of the Funds as a first step towards larger restoration efforts. Both agreements provide incentives for the parties to seek additional funding sources beyond Ruby’s contribution.

“We hope to encourage other private and public funders to contribute to the Funds’ efforts to permanently protect and restore large areas of high desert in the region the Ruby Pipeline will pass through,” said Cleary.

Ruby is a 42-inch interstate natural gas transmission pipeline, which will access significant Rockies supplies and make them available to consuming markets in California, Nevada, and the Pacific Northwest. Ruby will transport natural gas from an existing supply hub at Opal, Wyoming, to interconnections near Malin, Oregon. It will have an initial design capacity of 1.5 billion cubic feet per day.

Western Watersheds Project is a western regional conservation group headquartered in Idaho with field offices in Wyoming, Utah, Montana, Arizona and California. The mission of Western Watersheds Project is to restore western watersheds and wildlife through education, public policy initiatives and litigation.

The Oregon Natural Desert Association is a 1,400 member non-profit public interest organization dedicated to preserving and protecting the public lands and ecosystems of eastern Oregon. ONDA’s mission is to protect, defend, and restore forever the health of Oregon’s native deserts.