Gentle giant

State touts BP America’s method of laying pipe, saving fragile marsh

By MIKE DUNNE
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BP America and other oil company partners will build a 160-mile pipeline system from a new deepwater oil and gas field in the Gulf of Mexico to an onshore facility in Lafourche Parish — and not destroy one foot of coastal marsh in the process.

State officials plan to point to that feat when others want to dredge fragile marsh to lay pipelines. Two legs of the new five-pipeline $1 billion Mardi Gras Transportation System will remain completely underwater, and the company will drill under any islands and several busy waterways to minimize the pipelines’ impact.

The extra effort isn’t cheap. It will add an extra 9 miles of pipeline at a cost of about $10 million, according to pipeline project manager Jerry Wenzel. Mardi Gras Transportation Systems is a partnership between BP and other oil companies.

Each leg will be constructed and operated by limited liability corporations with different partners, each named for New Orleans Mardi Gras krewes. For example, the two legs bringing in the oil from a new deepwater field called Thunder Horse will be named for Proteus and Endymion.

Thunder Horse Field lies under 6,000 feet of water in the Gulf of Mexico. The field is estimated to hold 1.5 billion barrels of oil and gas equivalent. BP owns 75 percent of the field and ExxonMobil 25 percent.

“Normally, the cheapest and fastest (way) would be a straight shot to Clovelly” in Lafourche Parish, where the new pipeline will connect with existing systems, Wenzel said. Clovelly is about 35 miles northwest of Grand Isle.

“But we started talking about a year and a half ago to public officials and agencies about sensitive areas. We came up with seven alternatives” and picked the one with “no footprint and no damage to the area,” Wenzel said.

“We thought it was worth the additional dollars and the right thing to do for BP and the land in Louisiana,” Wenzel said.

The 28-inch diameter Proteus pipeline system will begin at Thunder Horse and run 71 miles under the gulf to a platform near Southwest Pass. From there, the 30-inch Endymion pipeline will bring the oil to shore in Clovelly in Lafourche Parish, east of Cutoff.

BP officials are not the only ones touting the project.

“You have really done this the right way,” said Randy Hanchey, assistant secretary of the state Department of Natural Resources. “You have gone beyond what we would normally see ... and set a standard we hope we can hold others too.”

Source: BP Americas

Marsh-friendly pipeline route

BP Americas and other oil company partners plan to build a pipeline that will require laying an extra nine miles at a cost of $10 million, but not 1 acre of wetlands will be destroyed. The pipeline will be underwater or go through existing canals or will drill under islands. The Endymion pipeline, owned and operated by Mardi Gras Transportation Systems, will set a standard for other pipelines to come, state officials said. If built like a traditional pipeline taking a straight shot from Grand Isle to Clovelly in Lafourche Parish, about 35 miles, many acres of fragile wetlands would be destroyed.

Source: BP Americas

Advocate map by John Gipson
“Had things been done like this for the last 40 years, we wouldn’t have some of the (coastal wetlands loss) problems we have today,” Hanchey said. Studies have shown about one-third or more of the wetlands lost in Louisiana were from oil and gas activities, such as dredging the marsh for pipeline canals.

Phil Bowman of the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries told BP officials “you have covered the bases well.” Bowman and Hanchey heard a presentation by the company at a recent meeting of the State Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Authority.

Hanchey said when other companies apply for permits that might impact wetlands, the Department of Natural Resources can point to the Mardi Gras projects as a model of no impact to the marsh.

“Any area where we didn’t want to dredge through, we will drill under,” Wenzel said. There will be five directional drillings for a total of 22,227 feet — about 4.2 miles total. For example, to get under Grand Isle, where the line will surface briefly for a future pumping station and valves, the company will drill 5,053 feet from under the gulf to the island. Then, drilling will go back under the rest of the island, under nearby Fifi Island and back up into Barataria Bay for another 4,158 feet.

The pipeline will also go around Queen Bess Island, a major brown pelican rookery. “We tried to stay as far away from that as possible and get no nearer than 3,500 feet,” Wenzel said.

“We are following open water and existing rights of way until we get to Clovelly,” where the pipeline will tap into existing facilities for further shipment, Wenzel said.

“We will bury it deeper than normal and use a stronger, concrete coating and we will try to keep it out of marine transportation channels,” he said.

When in production, Proteus and Endymion will have a capacity of 250,000 barrels a day, said Hugh Depland, general manager of public affairs for BP Americas.

“We are still seeking permits; we should have those shortly,” Depland said.

Wenzel said Mardi Gras Transportation Systems plans to “actually start installation of the pipeline in deep water this December.”