

ReConnect Program | Site and Route Environmental Questionnaire

Applicant Name: _____
Application Number: _____
Site or Route Name: _____
Construction Asset Type: _____

Unless the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 process has already been initiated with Tribes, the State Historic Preservation Office, or other interested parties, do not initiate the NHPA Section 106 process without first consulting with the Rural Utilities Service (RUS). Please contact RUS by submitting a question through the Contact Us page (available at this link: <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us>). Go to the drop-down menu under “subject” and then click “Environmental.”

The Site and Route Environmental Questionnaire (EQ) is intended to capture the appropriate environmental information for each proposed site and route included in the application. This information will be used in conjunction with the Project EQ to determine the overall environmental compliance of the proposed project. RUS will use this information and either complete the environmental review process or determine the appropriate level of additional impact analyses needed, in accordance with 7 CFR 1970: Environmental Policies and Procedures (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeaXV>). RUS will notify applicants if additional information is necessary beyond what was submitted in the EQs.

An applicant must submit to RUS a copy of any environmental review document that has been prepared in connection with obtaining permits, approvals, or other financing for the proposed project from state, local, or other federal agencies. Such material, to the extent determined to be relevant, can be used to fulfill RUS' environmental review requirements.

Environmental Questions

- **Floodplains (Subpart F):** Use the **Flood Hazard Zones (FEMA)**¹ layer available in the construction map to determine potential impact to a floodplain. If the site or route falls within a community not participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) or an area of undetermined flood hazard (Zone D), use the **Flood Frequency (NRCS)**² layer available in the construction map to determine the flooding frequency of the area.

¹The minimum floodplain of concern is the 500-year floodplain. If your project is located in the 500-year or 100-year floodplain, it should be considered within a floodplain for environmental analysis.

² The frequency of “Rare,” “Occasional,” or “Frequent” should be considered within a floodplain for environmental analysis.

Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to and from floodplains can be found in RD Instruction 1970 - Subpart F – Floodplain Management (available at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970f.pdf>)

1) Is the applicant's proposed action located in a floodplain?

NO Go to Floodplains Question 3.

YES Go to Floodplains Question 2.

2) Does the applicant's proposed action in the floodplain consist of more than buried or aerial utilities lines?

NO Go to Floodplains Question 3.

YES Floodplain analysis is required at the project level. Complete the floodplain section of the Project EQ.

3) Does the applicant's proposed action have the potential to affect a floodplain?

NO Go to Floodplains Question 4.

YES Floodplain analysis is required at the project level. Complete the floodplain section of the Project EQ.

4) Does the applicant's proposed action have the potential to be affected by a floodplain?

NO The Floodplains review for this site or route is complete.

YES Floodplain analysis is required at the project level. Complete the floodplain section of the Project EQ.

- **Wetlands (Subpart G):** Use the **National Wetland Inventory (NWI)** layer available in the construction map to determine potential impact to a wetland. If the site or route overlaps with a wetland but you believe the Area of Interest (AOI) is not located within a wetland, use **Soil Hydric Class (NRCS) (Wetlands Subpart G)** to determine the predominance of hydric soils in an area. Be advised, if any part of the AOI lists a Soil Hydric Class of 'Partially Hydric' (1 – 95 percent) or 'All Hydric' (96 – 100 percent), the AOI will be considered to be located in a wetland.

Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to wetlands can be found in RD Instruction 1970 - Subpart G - Wetland Protection (available at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970g.pdf>).

1) Is the applicant's proposed action located in a wetland?

NO Go to Wetlands Question 3.

YES Go to Wetlands Question 2.

2) Does the project's interaction with wetlands consist entirely of avoiding wetlands by means of directional boring?

NO Go to Wetlands Question 3.

YES The Wetlands review for this site or route is complete.

3) Does the applicant's proposed action have the potential to be affect a wetland?

NO Go to Wetlands Question 4.

YES A wetlands permit is required for this project. Go to Wetlands Question 5.

4) Does the applicant's proposed action have the potential be affected by a wetland?

NO The Wetlands review for this site or route is complete.

YES A wetlands permit is required for this project. Go to Wetlands Question 5.

5) What kind of permit is required to address wetland impacts?

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Individual Permit

- **If the Individual Permit has already been obtained**, attach it under the Environmental Documents section of this application. The wetlands review for this site or route is complete.
- **If an individual permit has not been obtained**, complete the wetlands section of the Project EQ.

- USACE Nationwide or General Permit³
 - Complete the wetlands section of the Project EQ, omitting the public notice requirements as being fulfilled by the USACE Nationwide Permits (NWP) Program. Identify the NWP or General Permit Number below.

NWP or General Permit Number: _____

- Local permit **OR** unknown permit **OR** permit undetermined
 - Complete the Wetlands section of the Project EQ.
- **Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) (Subpart L):** Use the **Farmland Class (NRCS) (FPPA)**⁴ layer available under the **Land Use (Subpart L)** category in the construction map to determine potential impact to a Farmland. Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to farmlands can be found in RD Instruction 1970 - Subpart L – Land Use and Formally Classified Land (available at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970l.pdf>).

1) Will the site or route overlap an area identified as protected farmland in the construction map?

NO The FPPA review for this site or route is complete.

YES The site or route will cross or take place on an area identified as protected.

2) Does the applicant's proposed project consist solely of routes utilizing construction techniques along existing ROW?

NO Go to FPPA Question 3.

YES The FPPA review for this site or route is complete.

³ Additional information on the USACE Nationwide Permit Program is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeaR2>

⁴ For the purpose of FPPA, farmland includes, "All areas are prime farmland," "Farmland of unique importance," "Farmland of statewide importance," or "Farmland of local importance." Be advised: farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for cropland. It can be forest land, pastureland, cropland, or other land, but not water or urban built-up land.

- 3) Are the sites or routes where a new ROW or easement will need to be established located on land that has previously been converted for use and can no longer be utilized as farmland?

NO Go to FPPA Question 4.

YES Explain in the text entry box. The FPPA review for this site or route is complete.

- 4) Does the action result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses?

NO Explain in the text entry box. The FPPA review for this site or route is complete.

YES Go to FPPA Question 5.

- 5) Is the entire site or route located in an “urbanized area” as identified in a Census Bureau Map (information available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeaRJ>) with a “tint overprint” on a USGS Topographical Map (information available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeanr>)?

NO Please complete the appropriate Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form on behalf of the federal agency and submit to the appropriate NRCS State FPPA contact (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeaUw>). Include the completed farmland consultation under the Environmental Documents section of this application, and complete the FPPA section of the Project EQ.

- **Subpart L AD-1006** for sites (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeaUM>)
- **Subpart L NRCS CPA-106** for routes (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeaPc>)

YES Please attach the Census Bureau or USGS Topographical Map under the Environmental Documents section of this application. The FPPA review for this site or route is complete.

- **Threatened and Endangered Species (Subpart N):** Use the Endangered Species link for each site or route in the Environmental Questionnaire (EQ) section of your application to request an “Official Species List” from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) project planning tool⁵. Applicants must include this species list and appropriate species accounts (for example: requisite habitat) for each site or route included in the application. An official species list is a letter from the local USFWS office with information that assists in the evaluation of potential impacts of this project. An electronic copy of this list is available to download upon completion of the IPaC regulatory review process.

Listed marine species are managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries. Projects occurring in water or in proximity to water should obtain lists from the appropriate Fisheries office (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeaE8>).

The list(s) obtained from the USFWS and NOAA should be used to complete the Subpart N Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species Table (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xerfT>). Please attach the completed table under the Environmental Documents section of this application.

Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species Table Guidance:

Research each species identified on the Official Species List(s) to complete the Description of the Suitable Habitat column.

⁵ You must create a free account (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeamV>) and login to IPaC using this link: <https://ecos.fws.gov/ipac/> before you can receive an official letter and species list from the local USFWS. The Endangered Species link for each site or route in the EQ will transfer the geospatial data to USFWS. Click “Define Project” and enter a project name and description. On the Project Home page, click “Request Species List” or click “Start Review” and follow the prompts.

Cross-reference the species information gained through your research, with your knowledge of the project site or route, to identify the “Potential for Occurrence”:

- If Critical Habitat is present or a survey indicates species are present, select “Documented,” and explain.
- If suitable habitat is present, and no other data indicate species or critical habitat are absent, select "Likely" and explain.
- If suitable habitat is present but based on your knowledge of the site or route, is unlikely for species to occur, select “Unlikely” and explain your reasoning.
- If suitable habitat is present, but data (for instance, surveys) indicate species and critical habitat are absent from the action area, select “None” and cite the survey.
- If suitable habitat is not present in the action area, select "None" and explain your reasoning.

Next, “Propose a Finding of Effect”:

- If species are not present, conclude "No Effect" and explain your finding.
 - If species are identified, “lack of critical habitat” or “familiarity with the proposed area” are not sufficient reasonings for a finding of “No Effect.”
- If species may be present in the action area but will not be exposed directly or indirectly to the proposed action or any resulting environmental changes, conclude "No Effect" and explain your finding.
- If species may be present in the action area, will be exposed to the action but will not respond in any manner, conclude "No Effect" and explain your finding.
- If species may be present in the action area and will respond upon exposure to the action, but effects will be wholly beneficial⁶,

⁶ “Beneficial effects” are positive responses without any negative response. This analysis is done at the individual level. If an action will have beneficial effects for the species overall, but adversely impacts one or more individuals in the process, "likely to adversely affect" is the appropriate conclusion.

insignificant⁷, or discountable⁸, conclude “may affect, not likely to adversely affect”

- If you cannot conclude that the response will be wholly beneficial or insignificant, or that the exposure or response is discountable, conclude “May Affect - Likely to Adversely Affect.”

Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to biological resources can be found in RD Instruction 1970 - Subpart N – Biological Resources (available at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970n.pdf>).

- **Transportation (Subpart O):** Responses to Transportation (Subpart O) questions are only required if the construction asset type is a “Site.”

Air

If required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), or if the applicant proposes any of the following types of construction or alteration, the applicant must file a notice with the FAA. Use the FAA Notice Criteria Tool (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeayP>) to help determine whether your project construction requires filing with the FAA for proposed structures.

- 1) Is the applicant required to file a notice with the FAA?

NO

YES Identify the reason(s) why a notice must be filed and file a notice at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeayE>.

- Required by the FAA
- Proposed construction or alteration that is more than 200 feet above ground level at its site.
- Proposed construction or alteration that exceeds an imaginary surface extending outward and upward at any of the following slopes:

⁷ “Insignificant effects” are responses that are incapable of being detected, measured, or evaluated. This analysis relates to the amount or extent of the impact. If the impact will likely be negative but the consequences are so minute that a person could not measure or detect such responses, then it is appropriate to conclude insignificant effects.

⁸ “Discountable” means extremely unlikely to occur.

- (a) 100 to 1 for a horizontal distance of 20,000 feet from the nearest point of the nearest runway of an airport⁹ with its longest runway more than 3,200 feet in actual length, excluding heliports.
- (b) 50 to 1 for a horizontal distance of 10,000 feet from the nearest point of the nearest runway of an airport with its longest runway no more than 3,200 feet in actual length, excluding heliports.
- (c) 25 to 1 for a horizontal distance of 5,000 feet from the nearest point of the nearest landing and takeoff area of a heliport.

On-Road

1) Has a Traffic Impact Study (TIS) been completed?

NO Go to On-Road Question 2.

YES Please upload the TIS to the Environmental documents section of the Application and go to On-Road Question 5.

2) Will this project cause an increase in traffic in the surrounding area during construction or operation?

NO Go to On-Road Question 5.

YES Describe the magnitude of the increase in the text entry box.

⁹ Airports and heliports include: (1) A public use airport listed in the Airport - Facility Directory, Alaska Supplement, or Pacific Chart Supplement of U.S. Government Flight Information Publications (2) A military airport under construction, or an airport under construction that will be available for public use (3) An airport operated by a federal agency or the Department of Defense (4) An airport or heliport with at least one FAA-approved instrument approach procedure.

3) Will hazardous materials be involved?

NO Go to On-Road Question 5.

YES Go to On-Road Question 4.

4) Will vehicles be carrying hazardous wastes through or past the project site?

NO

YES

5) Will the applicant be able to obtain all proper permissions and permits from any applicable federal, state, or local agencies?

NO

YES