

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGENCY: USDA-Rural Development/Rural Utilities Service

Notice of Availability of a Final Supplemental Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for Cardinal-Hickory Creek 345-kV Transmission Line Project Route Modifications

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to a supplemental environmental analysis for the Cardinal-Hickory Creek 345-kilovolt (kV) Transmission Line Project (C-HC Project). RUS is issuing a Final Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the C-HC Project.

A copy of the Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) may be viewed on the RUS project website:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/impact-statement/cardinal-hickory-creek-transmission-line-project-iowa-wisconsin>. This page is accessible by visiting the USDA Rural Development homepage, clicking on the “Resources” dropdown banner along the top of the page, clicking “Environmental Studies,” then “Impact Statements.” On the Impact Statements page, the C-HC Project webpage link is provided under “Dairyland Power Cooperative.”

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In September 2023, RUS published the Draft Supplemental EA (SEA) in connection with possible impacts related to nine proposed route modifications for the Cardinal-Hickory Creek 345-kV Transmission Line Project, including one proposed land exchange action involving U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-managed land within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. The Draft SEA described the project, assesses the project’s environmental impacts, and summarizes mitigation measures used to minimize the environmental effects. The SEA tiers to the Final Environmental Impact Statement that was published for the approved C-HC Project in October 2019. On January 16, 2020, the RUS, USFWS, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) approved various components of the C-HC Project and the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed by the three agencies.

RUS released the SEA to obtain feedback from the public, as part of the federal environmental review process required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 7 CFR 1970 related to providing financial assistance to Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) for its share in the construction of a proposed 345-kV transmission line and associated infrastructure connecting the Hickory Creek Substation in Dubuque County, Iowa, with the Cardinal Substation in the Town of Middleton, Wisconsin (near Madison, Wisconsin).

The availability of the Draft SEA for public review was announced in local newspapers on September 8, 2023. A 14-day comment period was provided for review of the SEA. Copies of the Final SEA and FONSI are available from RUS or Dairyland Power Cooperative, 3521 East Avenue, South, La Crosse, WI 54602 and in the six libraries where hard copies of all previous documents for public comment for the C-HC Project have been available.

- Dodgeville Public Library, 139 S. Iowa St, Dodgeville, WI
- Dubuque County Library, Asbury Branch, 5290 Grand Meadow Drive, Asbury, IA
- Eckstein Memorial Library, 1034 E. Dewey St, Cassville, WI
- Guttenberg Public Library, 603 S 2nd St, Guttenberg, IA
- Middleton Public Library, 7425 Hubbard Ave, Middleton, WI

- Schreiner Memorial Library, 113 W. Elm St, Lancaster, WI

Based on its SEA, RUS has concluded that the nine proposed route modifications for the C-HC Project would not result in significant changed circumstances or new significant impacts to geology and soils; vegetation, including wetlands; wildlife; historic properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places; federally listed threatened and endangered species, candidate species, or federally designated critical habitat; water resources and quality; 100-year floodplains; air quality and climate change; noise; land use; transportation; visual resources; or human health and safety. The proposed project would not disproportionately affect minority or low-income populations.

In accordance with the NEPA, as amended (42 U.S. Code 4321 et seq.), the CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), and RUS’s Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970), RUS has determined that the environmental effects of the route modifications have been adequately analyzed for any potential future action that it considers and that no significant impacts to the quality of the human environment would result from construction and operation of the route modifications. Any final action by RUS related to the route modifications will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant federal and state environmental laws and regulations. Because RUS’s potential action relating to this new information and changed circumstance is not expected to result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for the route modifications.

Dated: October 6, 2023.