

**FINDING OF NO  
SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Cobblestone Park II 69 kV Transmission Line and Distribution Substation  
Central Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.  
Richland County, South Carolina**

**Rural Utilities Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture**

**Prepared by:  
Environmental and Historic Preservation Division  
Rural Utilities Service**

**February 2025**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Central Electric Power Cooperative, Inc. (CEPCI) plans to submit a financing request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to construct the proposed 1.80-mile 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to serve a new Cobblestone Park II distribution substation in Richland County, South Carolina. The new Cobblestone Park II substation will be constructed on a 3.20-acre site by Fairfield Cooperative (FEC). FEC intends to apply separately for RUS funding for the construction of the distribution substation. The transmission line and distribution station will be part of and serve a 2,581-acre Scout Motors manufacturing facility project proposed by the South Carolina Department of Commerce and Richland County.

RUS is considering this financing request. Prior to taking a federal action (i.e., providing financial assistance), RUS is required to complete an environmental impact analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA: 42 United States Code [U.S.C.] § 4321–4347), the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500–1508), and USDA Rural Development's NEPA implementing regulations, Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970).

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Charleston District, was the lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (i.e., action area), and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) acted as a cooperating agency. RUS conducted its own Section 106 consultation for the Cobblestone Park II 69kV Transmission Line and Distribution Substation Project.

The USACE prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Scout Motor manufacturing facility that includes the Cobblestone Park II 69kV Transmission Line and Distribution Substation Project, and after completing an independent analysis of the EA, RUS concurred with its scope and content. In accordance with 40 CFR § 15603, RUS adopted USACE's EA as the Agency's EA for the proposed Project. RUS finds that the EA is consistent with federal regulations and meets the standards for an adequate assessment. In addition, RUS considers the proposed Project an undertaking subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), 16 USC 470(f), and its implementing regulation, "Protection of Historic Properties" (36 CFR Part 800).

## **B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

CEPCI's new 1.80-mile 69 kV transmission line and FEC's Cobblestone Park II distribution substation are being constructed to support the proposed Scout Motors facility located south and east of Blythewood Road, east and west of I-77 and west of U.S. 21 in Blythewood, SC. The Scout facility will impact 69.708 acres of wetlands, 38.219 acres of ponds and 35,691 linear feet of tributaries. The new transmission line and distribution substation will impact 2.3 acres of the 69.708 acres of wetland impacts that were reviewed and analyzed by the USACE.

## **C. PURPOSE AND NEED**

USDA, Rural Development, RUS, is a mission area that includes three federal agencies: (1) Rural Business–Cooperative Service; (2) Rural Housing Service; and (3) RUS. The agencies offer more than 50 programs that provide financial assistance and a variety of technical and educational assistance to eligible rural and Native American Tribal populations, eligible communities, individuals, cooperatives, and other entities with a goal of improving the quality of life, sustainability, infrastructure, economic

opportunity, development, and security in rural America. Financial assistance can include direct loans, guaranteed loans, and grants in order to accomplish program objectives. The Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended (7 USC §901 *et seq.*), authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to make rural electrification and telecommunication loans, including specifying eligible borrowers, references, purposes, terms and conditions, and security requirements. The Project and borrower meet the eligibility requirements to receive the loan through RUS, as established by the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 and pursuant to 7 CFR Chapter XVIII.

CEPCI is seeking federal financial assistance for the proposed Project from RUS. RUS has reviewed the purpose and need for the proposed Project and determined that the proposal will meet the present and future needs of CEPCI.

#### **D. ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED**

The alternatives evaluated include the No Action alternative, the Proposed (Project) Alternative, Alternative Sites (Offsite) and Alternative Layouts, all of which are discussed in the EA prepared by the USACE.

#### **E. SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

The analyses in the EA documented that the proposed Project would have no significant adverse effects to existing land use, floodplains, threatened and endangered species, water resources, coastal resources, the surrounding community, air quality, noise, transportation, aesthetics, or human health and safety. Additionally, RUS completed its own Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) consultation for CEPCI's transmission line and FEC's distribution substation that resulted in a finding of no historic properties affected. RUS conducted its own Section 106 consultation for the Cobblestone Park II 69kV Transmission Line and Distribution Substation Project and determined that it will have no effect on historic properties in accordance with 36 CFR § 800.4(d)(1).

CEPCI will impact 2.3 acres of wetlands for the construction of the transmission line and those impacts are included in the USACE's overall evaluation and permitting for the 2,581-acre Scout Motor facility that will impact 69,708 acres of wetlands, 38,219 acres of ponds and 35,691 linear feet of tributaries.

USACE determined that the proposed project will have adverse effects on historic properties. The impacts to and the effects of the proposed development will cause some identified adverse effects to historic properties, however, the effects were not considered to be potentially significant. The USACE, FHWA, the SC State Historic Preservation Office, and the South Carolina Department of Commerce (the permit Applicant) and Richland County executed an MOA on December 18, 2023.

#### **F. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Two public notices were issued by the USACE on June 1, 2023, and September 21, 2023, respectively. The second notice was considered a "Supplemental" public notice and advertised the Applicant's revised permit application dated September 15, 2023 and updated compensatory mitigation proposal.

#### **G. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on the EA, RUS has concluded that the proposed Project would have no significant effects to existing land use, floodplains, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, water resources, coastal resources, the surrounding community, air quality, noise, transportation, aesthetics, or human

health and safety.

As mitigation for the wetland and stream impacts, the USACE is requiring that South Carolina Department of Commerce and Richland County purchase credits from an approved mitigation bank, followed by the use of an approved in lieu fee program, and the development of a permittee-responsible mitigation plan.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), and RD’s Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970), RUS has determined that the environmental impacts of the proposed Project have been adequately addressed and that no significant impacts to the quality of the human environment would result from construction and operation of the proposed Project. Any final action by RUS related to the proposed Project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant federal and state environmental laws and regulations. Because RUS’s action will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, RUS will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its potential federal action associated with the proposed Project.

#### **H. RUS LOAN REVIEW AND RIGHT OF ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW**

This FONSI is not a decision on a loan application and therefore not an approval of the expenditure of federal funds. Issuance of the FONSI and its notices concludes RUS’s environmental review process. The ultimate decision on loan approval depends upon conclusion of this environmental review process in addition to financial and engineering reviews. Issuance of the FONSI and publication of notices will allow for these reviews to proceed. The decision to provide financial assistance also is subject to the availability of loan funds for the designated purpose in RUS’s budget. There are no provisions to appeal this decision (i.e., issuance of a FONSI). Legal challenges to the FONSI may be filed in Federal District Court under the Administrative Procedures Act.

#### **I. APPROVAL**

This Finding of No Significant Impact is effective upon signature.

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#### **Contact information**

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