

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Dry Creek to Smyrna Transmission Line
Carroll and Madison counties, Arkansas**

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

Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation

**Prepared by:
Engineering and Environmental Staff
Rural Utilities Service**

February 2023

A. INTRODUCTION

Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation (CECC) plans to submit a financing request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to construct the proposed Dry Creek to Smyrna Transmission Line (Project) in Carroll and Madison counties, Arkansas. 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) (U.S.C. 4231 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and RD's NEPA implementing regulations, Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970). After completing an independent analysis of an environmental report prepared by Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation and its consultant, RUS concurred with its scope and content. In accordance with 7 CFR § 1970.102, RUS adopted the report and issued it as the Agency's Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Project. RUS finds that the EA is consistent with federal regulations and meets the standards for an adequate assessment. Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation published newspaper notices, announcing the availability of the EA for public review, in accordance with 7 CFR § 1970.102. 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 AND PURPOSE/NEED

The overall purpose of the Project is to construct the Dry Creek to Smyrna Transmission Line Project in Carroll and Madison counties, Arkansas. The Project will build a 161 kilovolt (kV) transmission line between the Dry Creek Switching Station and the Smyrna Transmission-Distribution Substation. The Dry Creek to Smyrna transmission line is 31.4 miles in length and will utilize H-frame steel structures. Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation will utilize a 100-foot-wide right-of-way (ROW) and temporary construction access roads to construct the transmission line, along with additional ROW to install guy wires. Construction of the transmission line is proposed to commence in winter 2023 and be completed in fall 2024. RUS have reviewed the purpose and need for the Project and determined that the proposal will meet the present and future needs of Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation.

C. ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED

1. No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, RUS would not provide financial assistance to Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation, and/or the proposed Project would not be constructed. This alternative would not assist Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation in providing electricity to rural residents.

2. Action Alternative (Preferred Alternative)

Under the Action Alternative, RUS would consider financing the proposed Project, and Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation would construct the Dry Creek to Smyrna Transmission Line Project. The proposed Project would build a 161 kilovolt (kV) transmission line between the Dry Creek Switching Station and the Smyrna Transmission-Distribution Substation. The Dry Creek to Smyrna transmission line is 31.4 miles in length and will utilize H-frame steel structures. Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation will utilize a 100-foot-wide right-of-way (ROW) and temporary construction access roads to construct the transmission line, along with additional ROW to install guy wires. Construction of the transmission line is proposed to commence in winter 2023 and be completed in fall 2024.

3. Alternatives Eliminated from Further Consideration

In addition to the No Action Alternative and Action Alternative, Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation considered other technology and siting alternatives, which are documented in the Alternatives section of the EA: route alternatives, evaluated during route identification process and macro-corridor study.

D. SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The analysis in the EA documented that the proposed Project would have no adverse effects to land use & important farmland, floodplains, wetlands, water resources, coastal resources, biological resources, cultural resources & historic properties, aesthetics, air quality, socioeconomic/environmental justice, miscellaneous issues (noise, transportation), human health & safety, and corridors. In accordance with the requirements of § 1970.104(b), a summary of anticipated impacts on the human environment is provided below, including any mitigation measures deemed necessary to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts. Carroll Electric Cooperative Corporation is responsible for implementing these measures.

There are no public lands or parks within or bordering the Project ROW. The Project will not cross or impact Formally Classified Lands. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) local office replied to a request for consultation that the Project will have an

indirect effect and it will not prevent the land from being used in agricultural production and will not affect prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance. Therefore, the Project will have no impact to formally classified lands or important farmland.

Some of the Project route passes through 100-year floodplains / flood zones or wetlands. The three structures that are proposed within 100-year flood zones will be designed and constructed as not to impede the flow of any waterway or create any hazard during flooding events. There will be no modification to flood zone elevations or flood storage capacity. Project activities will be completed under Nationwide Permit 57. Additionally, utility lines are not considered to be a conversion of floodplains or wetlands. Therefore, the Project will have no adverse impact to floodplains or wetlands.

The Project area is not in a designed sole source aquifer. The Project will use best management practices and mitigation measures to protect water resources. The Project area is not located in or adjacent to any coastal zone or coastal barrier resource system. Therefore, the Project will have no impact to water resources or coastal resources.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service local field office concurred that the Project may affect the federally listed Northern Long-eared Bat, Indiana Bat, Gray Bat, Ozark Big-eared Bat, and the proposed Tricolored Bat. It also concurred that the Project will have no effect to or is not likely to adversely affect the other seven federally listed or candidate species on the official species list. Updated consultation was completed for the Northern Long-eared Bat for the status change to an endangered species. There are no critical habitats or known eagle nests within the Project area. The Project will complete tree clearing outside the migratory bird nesting season. The Project will use a vegetation management plan to revegetate the ROW after construction and then to maintain vegetation. Therefore, the Project will have no adverse impact to biological resources.

Archeological surveys and a historic architectural structure evaluation were conducted in the Project Area of Potential Effect (APE). Consultation with conducted with the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) as the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). The SHPO concurred that there will be no adverse effect to historic properties for the proposed Project route, which will avoid potentially eligible archeological sites. The following Indian Tribes were contacted: Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Caddo Nation of Oklahoma, Cherokee Nation, Delaware Nation, Oklahoma, Osage Nation, Shawnee Tribe, and Quapaw Tribe of Indians. Therefore, the Project will have no adverse impact to cultural resources and historic properties.

The Project will minimize aesthetic issues along the route. Carroll and Madison counties are in attainment / unclassified for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for all six criteria air pollutants. Air emissions from construction activities are anticipated to be minor and temporary with no long-term impacts. The Project will not construct facilities that generate air emissions. The Project will benefit the local population by building electric power infrastructure and providing a temporary increase in jobs and purchases of local services. The population of the Project area is largely ethnically homogeneous and is similar to the state average 39 percent low-income population. Therefore, the Project will have no adverse impact to aesthetics, air quality, and socioeconomics / environmental justice.

The Project may have minor and temporary impacts to noise and transportation during construction, with no anticipated long-term impacts. Potential human health hazards will be mitigated with compliance with applicable health and safety standards. The Project utilized a route identification process and macro-corridor study to determine the best Project route and to minimize corridor issues. Therefore, the Project will have no adverse impact to noise, transportation, human health & safety, and corridors.

E. PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

A local newspaper advertisement, announcing the availability of the EA and participation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, was published on January 26 & February 2, 2023, in the Madison County Record, Carroll and Madison counties, Arkansas. A copy of the EA was available for public review at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessment/dry-creek-smyrna-transmission-line>. The 14-day comment period ended on February 8, 2023. RUS received no comments on the EA during the public review period.

F. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on its EA, RUS has concluded that the proposed Project would have no significant effects to land use & important farmland, floodplains, wetlands, water resources, coastal resources, biological resources, cultural resources & historic properties, aesthetics, air quality, socioeconomic/environmental justice, miscellaneous issues (noise, transportation), human health & safety, and corridors. The proposed Project will have no effects on historic properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and no effects to federally listed species or designated critical habitat. The proposed Project would not disproportionately affect minority or low-income populations.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), 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 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.

G. 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.

H. APPROVAL

This Finding of No Significant Impact is effective upon signature.

Dated:

CHRISTOPHER MCLEAN

Digitally signed by CHRISTOPHER MCLEAN
Date: 2023.02.10 11:50:41 -05'00'

CHRISTOPHER A. MCLEAN

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For additional information on this FONSI and EA, please contact Terry Czerwien, Environmental Protection Specialist, at terry.czerwien@usda.gov or (254)742-9704.