

McClellanville
115 -kV Transmission Line Project
Record of Decision



Prepared for:
**U.S. Department of
Agriculture, Rural Utilities
Service**

Cooperating Agencies:
**U.S. Army Corps of
Engineers, Charleston District**
**U.S. Forest Service, Francis
Marion National Forest**

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Responsible Federal Agency (Lead): U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service

Cooperating Agencies: U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Title: McClellanville 115-kV Transmission Line Project Record of Decision

Location: Berkeley County and Charleston County, South Carolina

Contacts

For further information about this Record of Decision, contact:

Suzanne Kopich
Environmental Protection Specialist
EHPD / WEP
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service
1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, DC 20250
Telephone: (202) 961-8514
Email: suzanne.kopich@usda.gov

For general information on the Rural Utilities Service's process for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, contact:

Christopher A. McLean
Acting Administrator
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service
1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, DC 20250
Telephone: (202) 720-6285
Email: christopher.mclean@usda.gov

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document constitutes the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS) record of decision (ROD) to approve the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed McClellanville 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission line (Project). It has been prepared in accordance with 40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1505.2 (2024).

1.1 Background/Project Description

Central Electric Power Cooperative, Inc. (Central Electric, or the Applicant) proposes to construct the McClellanville 115-kV transmission line and is requesting funding for the Project from RUS. RUS has determined that a loan for the Project is a federal action and is therefore subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 – 4347) and RUS regulations (7 CFR 1970).

RUS is the lead federal agency for the Project as defined by 40 CFR 1501.7(2024). Cooperating agencies include the USDA U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). As the lead federal agency, RUS must evaluate the Project's effect on historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (54 USC 306108) and its implementing regulation "Protection of Historic Properties" (36 CFR 800). Pursuant to 36 CFR 800.2(d)(3), RUS is using its procedures for public involvement under NEPA, in part, to meet its responsibilities to solicit and consider the views of the public during Section 106 review. Accordingly, comments submitted in the environmental impact statement (EIS) process also informed RUS's decision making in Section 106 review.

As proposed, the Project will include the construction and maintenance of a new 23.3-mile-long, 115-kV transmission line between an existing substation near Jamestown, South Carolina (SC), and a new substation near the town of McClellanville. The new substation would be constructed by Berkeley Electric Cooperative on an existing cleared parcel in Charleston County (Figure 1). The EIS evaluates impacts within a 600-foot-wide corridor (300 feet on either side of the centerline). A 75-foot right-of-way (ROW) has been identified within this corridor and is not expected to change other than to further avoid or minimize impacts. Over half of the Jamestown corridor (Proposed Action) and two alternative corridors would be located on National Forest System (NFS) lands managed by the Francis Marion National Forest (FMNF).

Prior publications for the Project include notices of intent (NOI) for a scoping period on November 29, 2005 and September 17, 2010; a notice of availability (NOA) of the draft EIS on May 29, 2014; an NOI/NOA of the supplemental draft EIS on August 30, 2019; and an NOA of the final EIS on October 18, 2024. Public meetings for the Project included two meeting during the scoping comment periods on December 14, 2005 and September 29, 2010; one meeting after publication of the draft EIS on June 3, 2014; and two meetings after publication of the supplemental draft EIS on September 17 and 19, 2019.

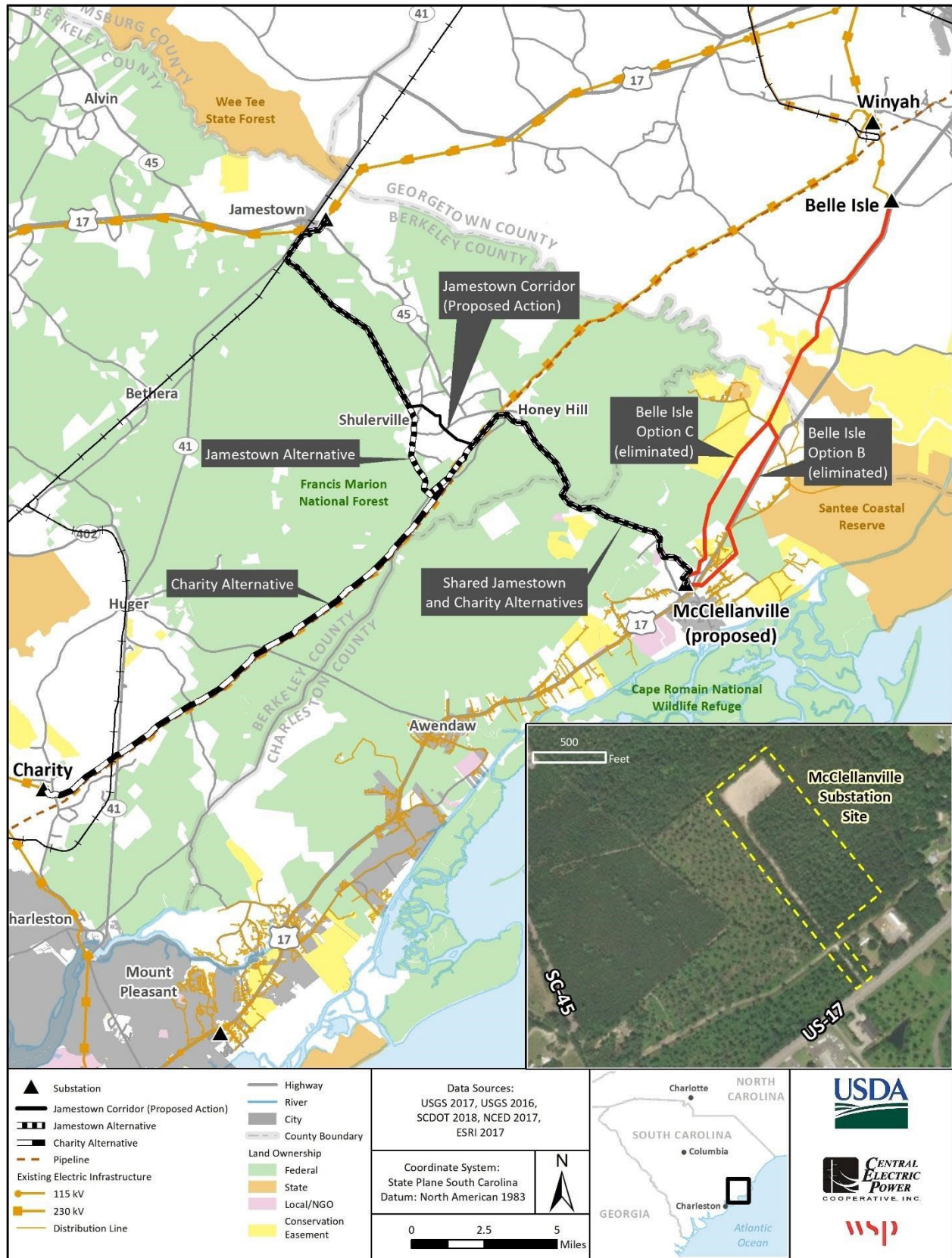


Figure 1. Proposed Action and Alternatives

1.2 Project Purpose and Need

The project purpose is to improve system reliability in the McClellanville service area. It is needed to reduce the number and duration of power outages; and reduce the number of community members affected. Central Electric's Board of Trustees, which consists of the twenty cooperatives, identified the need for the project due to the reliance on an aging 40-mile long distribution line supplying electricity to approximately 1,000 residents in the McClellanville service area. As the wholesale power and transmission provider to Berkeley Electric Cooperative, Central Electric must address the strained electrical system to ensure reliable service. The outdated network provides substandard electric service that cannot accommodate existing or future demand. The system also fails to meet the N-1 contingency standard for system reliability and the power grid must be able to cope with the failure of a line without significant power outages. Independent studies listed below in Section 2.1 recommend a new 115-kV transmission line and substation to meet long-term needs.

1.3 Federal and State Permits, Other Approvals, and Statutory Requirements Required to Implement Project Proposal

Table 1 identifies the permits, other approvals, and statutory requirements that may be required by federal or state agencies for the Project

Table 1. Federal and State Permits, Other Approvals, and Statutory Requirements

Agency	Permit, Regulation, or Approvals	Requirements
Rural Utilities Service	NEPA and other regulatory • compliance	Independently review and approve NEPA documentation. Ensure that all actions associated with the Project are in • compliance with applicable federal, state, and local regulations, including section 7 consultation for threatened and endangered species, section 106 consultation for cultural resources, and Clean Water Act permitting. • Sign this ROD Decide whether to approve financing assistance for the Project. • .
	Endangered Species Act, Incidental	• Prepare and submit a biological assessment for consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in accordance with the implementing regulations under section 7 the ESA.
	Coastal Zone Management Act •	Confirm that the project complies with the enforceable policies of the consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of South Carolina's Coastal Zone Management Program.
	National Historic Preservation Act • Section 106	Lead agency under Section 106 responsible for leading consultation and development of a Programmatic Agreement (PA).
	7 CFR 1970 (Environmental Policies and Procedures)	• Consult with appropriate agencies to provide decision makers with information to ensure that decisions and actions are based on an understanding of environmental consequences.

	E.O. 11988, <i>Floodplain Management</i> •	Avoid, to the extent possible, the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of flood plains.
	E.O. 11990, <i>Protection of</i> •	Ensure that short- and long-term impacts on wetlands are
Agency	Permit, Regulation, or Approvals	Requirements
	<i>Wetlands</i>	avoided where practical alternatives exist.
	E.O. 13112, <i>Invasive Species</i>	- Do not authorize, fund, or carry out actions that are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive species in the U.S.. - Implement all feasible and prudent measures to minimize risk of harm from introduction or spread of invasive species.
	E.O 13175	• Consultation and coordination with Indian Tribal representatives.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Clean Water Act, Section 404	• Regulate and provide permits for the discharge of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional wetlands of waters of the U.S..
U.S. Forest Service	Federal Land Policy and Management Act	- Implement operating plans. - Grant easement for the ROW across lands within FMNF.
	National Forest Management Act	• Grant a special use permit for location of transmission line under the Revised Land Management Plan for the FMNF.
	E.O 13007	• Avoid adverse effects to sacred sites.
	<i>Indian Sacred Sites on Federal Lands</i> •	Provide access to sacred sites to Native Americans for religious practices.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/ National Marine Fisheries Service	Endangered Species Act Section 7	- Provide guidance for avoiding and minimizing impacts to threatened and endangered species and critical habitat. - Participate in section 7 consultation. - Review the biological assessment and issue a biological opinion.
	Migratory Bird Treaty Act	• Avoid/minimize impacts to migratory birds and habitat.
	Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act	• In accordance with the permitting program established by the Division of Migratory Bird Management, if activities require the removal or relocation of an eagle nest, a permit is required from the Regional Bird Permitting Office.
	Fish and Wildlife Conservation • Act	Ensure that mitigation measures conserve wildlife and wildlife habitat.
	Fish and Wildlife Coordination • Act	In coordination with South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, provide consultation if it is determined that the Project would affect water resources.
	Clean Water Act, Section 404	• Work with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ensure regulation of discharge of dredged or fill material in jurisdictional wetlands of water of the U.S..
	National Invasive Species Act	• Prevent the introduction and spread of nonnative invasive species as a result of Project activities.

	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act	• Provide consultation if the Project may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat.
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation	Farmland Protection Policy Act	• Identify and quantify adverse impacts that the Project may have on farmlands. • Minimize contribution to the unnecessary and irreversible
Permit, Regulation, or Approvals		
Agency		Requirements
Service	Farmland Conversion Impact • Rating	- conversion of agricultural land to non- agricultural uses. - Provide consultation to minimize farmland conversion impacts. • Issue an Impact Rating.
Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration	Encroachment Permits	• Issue road crossing permits. • Issue state highway crossing permits; Issue state utility occupancy permits.
U.S. Department of Labor	Occupational Safety and Health Act	• Ensure that Occupational Health and Safety Administration standards are met during the construction, maintenance, and operation of the Project.
Federal Aviation Administration	Determination of No Hazard to Air Navigation	• Issue a determination stating whether the Project would be a hazard to air navigation.
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	NEPA	• Provide NEPA document review and rating.
	Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act	• Ensure that the use of insecticides, fungicides, and rodenticides is done in compliance with federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act regulations.
	Pollution Prevention Act	• Ensure that the Project is designed to comply with national policies for waste management and pollution control.
	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act	Ensure that the treatment, storage, and disposal of hazardous wastes associated with the Project would be handled in accordance with Resource Conservation and Recovery Act regulations.
	Noise Control Act	• Ensure that the Project is designed in a manner that furthers the national policy of promoting an environment free from noise that may jeopardize health and welfare.
SCDNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Biology & Management	Special use permit	• Issue permit for crossing state wildlife management area.
	State-listed species of concern	• Consultation and approval regarding state-listed species of concern.
	Non-native invasive plants	• Consultation regarding non-native invasive plants.
	Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act	In coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provide consultation if it is determined that the Project would affect water resources.

South Carolina Department of Environmental Services, Bureau of Water	Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 (Public Law 92-500), as amended by the CWA of 1977 (Public Law 95-217), as amended by the Water Quality Control Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-4). [33 USC §§1251 et seq.], the Pollution Control Act (South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Title 48, Chapter 1)	Ensure that the applicant has a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan as required under the South Carolina Pollutant Discharge Elimination System.
South Carolina Department of Environmental Services, Bureau of Coastal	South Carolina Coastal Management Act of 1977 and Federal Coastal Zone Management Act	• Coastal Zone Consistency certification.
Agency	Permit, Regulation, or Approvals	Requirements
Management		
South Carolina Department of Archives and History	National Historic Preservation Act Section 106	• Participate in Section 106 consultation with RUS (as lead agency) and other consulting parties
South Carolina Department of Highways and Public Transportation	Encroachment Permits	• Issue road crossing permits. • Issue state highway crossing permits. • Issue state utility occupancy permits.
Berkeley and Charleston and Counties	Local Issuing Authority for National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System and Storm water Pollution Prevention Plan permit	• Issue Storm water Pollution Prevention Plan permits.

1.3.1 Rural Utilities Services

The Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended (7 U.S.C. 901-918a), authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to make rural electrification and telecommunication loans, and specifies eligible borrowers, references, purposes, terms and conditions, and security requirements. RUS is authorized to make loans and loan guarantees to finance the construction of electric distribution, transmission, and generation facilities, including system improvements and replacements required to furnish and improve electric service in rural areas, as well as demand-side management, electricity conservation programs, and on- and off-grid renewable electricity systems.

The Applicant is requesting financing assistance from RUS for the Project. Financing for the purchase of the McClellanville Substation property was requested separately by Berkeley Electric and approved in 2003 prior to the initiation of the proposed transmission line. RUS's proposed federal action is to decide whether or not to provide financing assistance for the Project.

RUS will review the Applicant's financial and engineering considerations prior to making a final determination as to approving financial assistance for the Project, following the requirements of 7 CFR 1710. RUS agency actions include the following:

- Provide engineering reviews of the purpose and need, engineering feasibility, and cost of the Project.
- Ensure that the Project meets the borrower's requirements and prudent utility practices.
- Evaluate the financial ability of the borrower to repay its potential financial obligations to RUS.
- Ensure that NEPA and other environmental laws and requirements and RUS environmental policies and procedures are satisfied prior to taking a federal action.

1.3.2 U.S. Forest Service

The USFS has been involved in interagency coordination as a cooperating agency for the Project because the proposed transmission line would cross NFS lands managed by the FMNF. The USFS would need to issue a special use authorization for the Project to occupy NFS lands and will use the final EIS analysis in their decision making process to either approve or disapprove on the Applicant's request for a Special Use Permit (SUP). Central Electric has applied to the USFS for an SUP to construct and operate the Project. Any action taken by the Forest Supervisor must be consistent with the standards and guidelines in the applicable Land and Resource Management Plan. The proposed Project, including the alternatives considered in detail in the EIS, were reviewed for consistency with the FMNF Revised Land Management Plan (USFS 2017).

1.3.3 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

USACE has been involved in interagency coordination as a cooperating agency for the Project. USACE issues permits under Section 404 of the Clean Water for any activities that discharge fill into waters of the United States, including wetlands. Based on the available information, adverse impacts to waters of the United States cannot be avoided completely. Therefore, the Applicant will be required to submit an application for a Section 404 permit. The regulatory decision regarding which activities fall under a Section 404 of the Clean Water Act lies with the USACE Charleston District. A wetland delineation will be conducted within the proposed ROW and adverse effects to wetlands and other waters of the U.S. will be avoided and minimized to the maximum extent practicable during the design phase of the Project.

1.3.4 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been involved in interagency coordination as a participating agency throughout the development of the proposed action and alternative for the Project. USFWS is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. RUS, as the lead federal agency, is responsible for conducting consultation with USFWS. RUS engaged in formal consultation with USFWS because the Project is likely to adversely affect the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Dryobates borealis*, Threatened), northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*, Endangered), and tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*, Proposed Endangered). On December 11, 2024, USFWS issued a biological opinion (for listed species) and conference opinion (for non-listed species) that specified the extent of take allowed, the reasonable and prudent measures that would minimize impacts from the Project, and the terms and conditions with which RUS must comply.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION

As required by 40 CFR 1505.2(2024), RUS must identify the alternatives considered in reaching its decision and specify the environmentally preferable alternative or alternatives.

2.1 Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Consideration

RUS evaluated all reasonable alternatives and the EIS discusses the reasons for eliminating those alternatives per 40 CFR 1502.14(a). Per RUS guidance in Rural Development Instruction 1970-O (RUS 2016), a two-stage alternatives development and screening process was conducted. Stage 1 considered alternative technologies to the Project, whereas Stage 2 considered alternative locations for the Project.

As part of these investigations, Central Electric prepared several corridor-siting documents: an Alternatives Evaluation Study (Central Electric 2010a) and the Macro-Corridor Study (Central Electric 2010b); an Independent Engineering Study (McGavran 2017); and a supplemental routing study of the transmission corridor across private lands (WSP 2024). The Alternatives Evaluation Study evaluated electrical alternatives that best meet the Project's purpose and need and explained each alternative in detail so that interested agencies and the public could gain an understanding of each alternative. It determined that a new transmission line is the preferred solution to provide power to the McClellanville service area. RUS, in coordination with Central Electric, also analyzed a range of technological alternatives to determine if they would be appropriate to meet the Project purpose and need. Table 2 provides a summary of evaluated Stage 1 technology alternatives, and summarizes the screening findings. Alternatives were dismissed from further consideration if they failed one or more screening metrics. In addition to technology alternatives, Table 3 provides a summary of the considered alternative locations and the rationale for dismissal from further evaluation.

Table 2. Technology Alternatives Dismissed from Further Evaluation

Alternative	Description	Technological, Environmental, Operational (including permitting), or Economic constraint	Meets Purpose and Need?	Carried Forward for Analysis?
New Generation at McClellanville Substation Site and Energy Storage	Install onsite diesel generators to energize McClellanville Substation.	Requires air pollution permits under the Clean Air Act; high fuel costs with price volatility; does not eliminate the need for a future transmission line. High costs.	No	No
New Generation at McClellanville Substation Site and Energy Storage	Install onsite renewables and batteries (e.g., solar and battery combination) to energize McClellanville Substation.	Land-intensive; cannot meet N-1 criterion; insufficient for multiple days of electricity during outages; does not fully address purpose and need.	No	No
Rebuild Existing Distribution Line	Rebuild the existing distribution line system serving the McClellanville service area, with upgrades to the Commonwealth and Jamestown substations.	Does not meet N-1 criterion; high costs; extensive upgrades required, including new underground and overhead lines, voltage regulators, and SCADA systems; would not eliminate the need for a future transmission line.	No	No
Energy Conservation and Distributed Renewable Generation	Implement energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable energy programs to manage load growth in the McClellanville service area.	Cannot reliably meet forecasted load requirements; existing 40-mile distribution line will still experience outages, voltage sags, and require voltage regulators; does not address reliability issues.	No	No
Battery Storage in McClellanville	Implement energy storage solutions (gridlevel batteries, behind-the-meter technology, or a mix of both) to support the existing distribution system.	Requires significant system upgrades; does not account for growth; would only cover two-thirds of outages; behind-the-meter option necessitates major regulatory changes and forced compliance; interconnection and reliability challenges for "islanding" scenarios; high costs for battery systems (24,200-kWh for peak shaving; 75,000-kWh for islanding).	No	No

Table 3. Other Locations Considered and Dismissed from Further Evaluation

Alternative	Description	Rational for Dismissal from Further Evaluation
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New 230/115-kV Switching Stations and Associated Transmission Infrastructure	Construction of a new 230/115-kV substation tapping the Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line to provide 115-kV does service for the McClellanville Substation. Requires land clearing and grading of 10 acres, approval from Santee Cooper and state public service commission, and additional	High costs relative to benefits; reliability and security risks to the bulk transmission system; public service commission typically not support such an expensive option serving only one substation; inconsistent with standard practice for 230/115-kV substations to serve multiple substations. associated transmission infrastructure.
Commonwealth Corridor	Proposed co-location of a new transmission line with existing distribution corridors and major roads, originating from the Dominion Hamlin Substation and spanning 27.11 miles. Suggested to minimize environmental impacts by utilizing existing corridors.	Does not meet N-1 criterion because it relies on the same power source as the existing distribution line, creating a common outage risk; urbanized ROWs pose high costs, access, and maintenance challenges; estimated high costs; fails to meet project need criteria.
Belle Isle Corridor Options A, D, E, and F	Proposed transmission line corridors originating from Belle Isle Substation, crossing the Santee River, with lengths ranging from 16.1 to 19.9 miles. Selected initially to reduce impacts on residences and conservation lands.	Public opposition over cultural resources and environmental impacts of crossing the Santee River; not preferred based on Central Electric's routing studies and independent engineering studies, and these four Belle Isle corridors would have greater impacts than two Belle Isle corridors that were carried forward for analysis in the supplemental draft EIS.
Belle Isle No. 2 Corridor (Underground Santee River Crossing)	Proposed transmission line corridor originating from Belle Isle Substation, as above, but includes an approximately 2-mile subsurface directionally-drilled section below the Santee River, near U.S. Highway 17, to minimize visual and avian interaction impacts.	Extremely high costs (8–15 times overhead construction, additional cost for underground section); difficult and time-intensive maintenance and repairs; lack of local expertise and specialized equipment; high environmental impacts during installation; not suitable for radial line use without an overhead alternative.
Belle Isle Corridor Option B	16.3-mile corridor originating from Belle Isle Substation, crossing the Santee River and Santee Delta WMA, approximately 1.1 miles upstream of U.S. Highway 17; evaluated in the supplemental draft EIS.	Greater wetland impacts and significant ecological and scenic concerns over Santee Delta crossing; intersects numerous historic sites listed on, or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), including Hopsewee and Peachtree Plantations; public opposition to crossing the Santee River.
Belle Isle Corridor Option C	15.6-mile corridor originating from Belle Isle Substation, crossing the Santee River and Santee Delta WMA, approximately 1.3 miles upstream of U.S. Highway 17; evaluated in the supplemental draft EIS.	Similar to Option B, with significant wetland impacts from crossing the Santee River, ecological and scenic concerns, and conflicts with historic properties, including Hopsewee and Peachtree Plantations. Eliminated due to these issues of public concern.

2.2 Alternatives Evaluated in Detail

2.2.1 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the McClellanville Transmission Line would not be constructed and the existing distribution line that serves Dominion customers in the town of McClellanville would remain in place and be maintained for service to these customers. The existing environment would remain the same, and no land would be used for transmission lines, facilities, or a substation. The customers of Berkeley Electric in the McClellanville service area would continue to have worsening reliability and increased outages. In addition, future growth will add additional constraint to an already strained electrical system. The No Action Alternative does not meet the identified purpose and need for the Project.

2.2.2 Proposed Action

Central Electric proposes to construct and maintain a new McClellanville Substation and a new 23.3-mile long 115-kV transmission line that would connect it to the existing Jamestown Substation (Figure 1). The Project would occupy a 75-foot ROW. The Jamestown corridor would begin at the Jamestown Substation and travel southwest alongside existing road and railroad ROWs just over a mile before turning southeast at Tiger Corner Road (USFS Road 157). The corridor would follow Tiger Corner Road for approximately 6.5 miles to Shulerville. The alignment line would turn east approximately one mile north of the intersection of Tiger Corner Road and Shulerville Road, traveling cross-country over private lands for approximately 2.8 miles until it would encounter the existing Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line and Carolina Gas pipeline ROW, and follow northeast along the utility ROW northeast towards the community of Honey Hill. After 1.3 miles alongside the existing utility ROW, the alignment would turn east and follow SC Highway 45 for approximately 7.5 miles to the new McClellanville Substation near U.S. Highway 17.

Approximately 13.5 miles (58 percent) of the Jamestown corridor is located on NFS lands administered by the FMNF. The corridor follows existing ROWs for almost 90 percent of its length, lessening environmental impacts by up to 50 percent in those areas because the ROW would be able to overlap with the existing disturbed corridor. The Jamestown corridor encompasses a portion of the Santee River watershed, but would not cross the river. It would cross the Wambaw Creek near the western boundary of the Wambaw Creek Wilderness Area, immediately east of SC Highway 45, but would not cross the boundary of the wilderness area.

2.2.3 Other Action Alternatives

The final EIS evaluated two alternatives to the proposed action, the Jamestown Alternative and the Charity Alternative (Figure 1).

Similar to the Proposed Action, the Jamestown Alternative would also extend from the existing Jamestown Substation to a new McClellanville substation; however, the Jamestown Alternative would use a different alignment between Shulerville and Honey Hill. Rather than cutting across private lands, the Jamestown Alternative would extend approximately 3 miles to the south following Shulerville Road until its intersection with Halfway Creek Road. At this point, the Jamestown Alternative would angle northeast and follow Halfway Creek Road north towards Honey Hill until reaching the existing Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line ROW. It would turn and follow along the west side of the existing utility corridor for 1.5 miles until meeting with the Jamestown corridor (Proposed Action). From this point, the

Jamestown Alternative would take the same route to the McClellanville substation as the Proposed Action, following alongside the existing utility ROW and SC Highway 45.

Approximately 17.0 miles (65 percent) of the Jamestown Alternative is located on NFS lands FMNF. The corridor follows existing ROWs for over 95 percent of its length, lessening environmental impacts to the FMNF by up to 50 percent in those areas because the ROW would overlap with the existing disturbed road corridor. The Jamestown corridor encompasses a portion of the Santee River watershed, but would not cross the river. It would cross the Wambaw Creek near the western boundary of the Wambaw Creek Wilderness Area, immediately east of SC Highway 45, but would not cross the boundary of the wilderness area.

The Charity Alternative would be approximately 31.1 miles long and begin at the Charity Substation, which is located immediately east of the Cooper River outside North Charleston, South Carolina (Figure 1). The substation serves a large steel mill that has a very high reliability requirement and is served by the major 230-kV line from the Santee Cooper Winyah steam plant. From the substation, the line would continue east along an existing Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line and Carolina Gas pipeline ROW for approximately 20.9 miles, crossing SC Highway 41 and various roadways within the FMNF. In the vicinity of Honey Hill, the Charity Alternative would turn east from the existing ROW and follow SC Highway 45 with the same alignment as the Jamestown corridor to the McClellanville Substation.

Approximately 21.5 miles (69 percent) of the Charity Alternative is located on the FMNF. The corridor encompasses a portion of the Santee River watershed, but would not cross the North and South Santee River. The Charity Alternative would also cross Wambaw Creek near SC Highway 45 but would not cross the boundary of the wilderness area.

2.3 Alternatives Not Selected and RUS's Rationale

The alternatives evaluated in detail that were not selected are described below, along with RUS's rationale for elimination:

- **No Action Alternative:** This alternative would fail to address the purpose and need of the Project, which includes improving the reliability of the electrical system for the McClellanville service area. The current system is outdated and prone to outages that cannot sustain existing demand. Residents and businesses in the McClellanville service area rely on a 40-mile-long distribution line that suffers from poor reliability and power quality. Without a new transmission line, these reliability issues will persist, especially under more frequent extreme weather conditions due to climate change. Additional electrical demand from population and economic activities will further strain the already inadequate system. The No Action Alternative leaves the McClellanville service area vulnerable to power outages during any component failure of the existing system.
- **Jamestown Alternative:** The Jamestown Alternative would traverse greater areas of environmentally sensitive areas than the Jamestown corridor, including portions of the FMNF where red-cockaded woodpecker clusters occur alongside Shulerville Road and in the vicinity of several Carolina bays along Halfway Creek Road. This alternative also extends further south than necessary, before turning back north, in the area between Shulerville and Honey Hill. This results in the Jamestown Alternative being approximately 12 percent longer than the Proposed Action (Jamestown corridor) and having slightly greater wetland impacts and correspondingly greater impacts on wildlife habitats and other sensitive resources.

- **Charity Alternative:** The Charity Alternative would traverse approximately 31.1 miles, affecting approximately 33 percent more area than the 23.3-mile long Jamestown corridor (23.3 miles). The number of streams and waterbodies crossed by the transmission line under the Charity Alternative would be more than double that of the Proposed Action, and the length and area of wetlands crossed would be more than three times greater. Therefore, the Charity Alternative would have correspondingly greater potential impacts to wetlands and floodplains, and associated biological resources.

2.4 RUS' Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative for the Project is the Proposed Action, the Jamestown corridor.

This alternative was selected based on:

- public comments received through the NEPA process that were strongly opposed to a new transmission line crossing the Santee River and advocated for following existing ROWs; and
- information and environmental impact analysis presented in the EIS, including the evaluation of numerous alternatives studied over the course of two decades of project development.

The Jamestown corridor is the preferred transmission line route because of a combination of overall length, the amount that parallels existing ROW; and its avoidance of sensitive habitats, conservation lands, residences and other buildings, and cultural resources. Existing ROWs (roads and transmission lines) were used in designing the corridor as much as practicable. It is easily accessible via SC Highway 45 and paved local roads or forest service roads, which would minimize construction impacts and facilitate efficient operations and maintenance. Importantly, this avoids impacts to ecologically sensitive Carolina Bays on NFS lands in the vicinity of Halfway Creek Road by following the existing Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line.

2.5 Environmentally Preferable Alternative

This ROD is required to identify the environmentally preferable alternative (40 CFR 1505.2(b))2024), which is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in Section 101(B) of NEPA. This means that the environmentally preferable alternative is the “alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means that alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources” (CEQ 1981). To determine the environmentally preferable alternative, RUS considered the results of the environmental analyses presented in chapter 3 of the final EIS. Each alternative was evaluated in terms of potential adverse environmental impacts.

Although RUS is required to identify an environmentally preferable alternative in this ROD, the agency is not required to select the environmentally preferable alternative in their decision. For the environmentally preferable alternative, action alternatives were evaluated according to the nature and magnitude of their environmental consequences.

The environmentally preferable alternative for the Project is the Proposed Action. Both of the other action alternatives would have a larger footprint, and have greater impacts on wetlands and threatened and endangered species. Extensive studies and several routing efforts have been conducted to locate the corridor for the Proposed Action in locations that will minimize adverse environmental impacts and address the comments expressed by stakeholders, and balance environmental impacts to public and private

lands. The Proposed Action provides the best balance in minimizing impacts to social, cultural, and natural resources while also being technically and economically feasible to implement.

3.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

3.1 Scoping

Throughout the NEPA process, the public and various government agencies have had the opportunity to provide input and comment on the Project. On November 29, 2005, RUS published an NOI announcing its intent to hold public scoping meetings and prepare an environmental assessment (EA) (70 Federal Register [FR] 71462). A public scoping open house meeting was held on December 14, 2005, and the public was notified of this event by letter and by radio and newspaper announcements. Nearly 200 people, mostly local residents, attended the open house. After the first scoping meeting in 2005, RUS decided to re-scope the Project because of a change in the need to prepare an EIS rather than an EA, changes in potential transmission line corridors, and changes in updated planning documents that incorporated new and updated data (i.e., the Alternatives Evaluation Study and Macro-Corridor Study Report). RUS (2007) prepared a summary report of this scoping period.

On September 17, 2010, RUS published an NOI announcing its intent to hold a public scoping meeting and prepare an EIS (75 FR 56979). RUS also notified federal, state, and local agency representatives about the proposed Project by mail and invited them to attend an agency scoping meeting. A list of federally recognized Tribes with cultural interests near the Project area was compiled, and tribal leaders and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers were notified by mail and invited to attend the agency scoping meeting. A scoping meeting was held on September 29, 2010, at the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center in Awendaw, SC. Fifteen agency participants, representing USFS, South Carolina Department of

Natural Resources (SCDNR), USFWS, South Carolina Forestry Commission, and the town of McClellanville, attended the meeting. No representatives of federally recognized Tribes attended; however, representatives of the Catawba Indian Nation requested to be a consulting party under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Eastern Shawnee Tribe requested to be informed if cultural materials were encountered as the Project progressed. The primary environmental issues of the proposed Project identified by comments were the effects of its construction and operation on surface water; forest stands; rare threatened and endangered species; aesthetics; surface water, specifically crossing the Santee River; wetlands; and cultural resources and the potential for spreading invasive species. RUS (2011) prepared a summary report of this scoping period.

Because the Section 106 process is being streamlined with NEPA pursuant to 36 CFR 800.8, the public scoping process also provided meaningful opportunity for consulting parties to participate in the Section 106 process. RUS sent letters to federal and state agencies inviting them to participate in the public scoping meeting and provide input on Project-related concerns. Based on their involvement with prior projects in this area, three tribes were invited to participate in the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 review process, attend the public scoping meeting, and provide relevant information for inclusion in the EIS: the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and the Catawba Indian Nation. Only the Catawba Indian Nation chose to become a consulting party, and in the end, they did not comment on the EIS.

3.2 Draft EIS

On May 29, 2014, RUS published an NOA announcing the availability of a draft EIS for the Project (79 FR 30805). A public meeting was held on June 3, 2014, at the St. James-Santee Elementary-Middle School in McClellanville to solicit comments on the Draft EIS. RUS received comments from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USACE, U.S. Department of Interior Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance, National Marine Fisheries Service, USFWS, SCDNR, South Carolina Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee, Coastal Conservation League, Ducks Unlimited, Historic Charleston Foundation, South Carolina Audubon Society, Avian Conservation Center (Center for Birds of Prey), South Carolina Chapter of the Wildlife Society, South Carolina Waterfowl Association, Cape Romain Bird Observatory,

Lowcountry Open Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, St. James-Santee Restoration and Preservation Committee, Evening Post Industries, White Oak Forestry Company, and 197 individuals. All public comments received on the Draft EIS and RUS's responses were intended to be provided in Appendix E of the final EIS, but were not and have been added as appendix A of this ROD (see section 3.7)

Public comments on the 2014 draft EIS raised significant concerns about potential environmental and cultural impacts. Key environmental concerns included the preservation of the Santee River Delta, identified as a critical habitat for migratory birds, and worries about habitat loss, bird strikes, and fragmentation of wetlands. Cultural concerns focused on the adverse effects on historic properties such as the Peachtree Plantation, King's Highway, and several plantations protected under conservation easements, many of which are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Commenters highlighted the perceived inadequacy of the draft EIS in analyzing alternatives like upgrading existing lines or pursuing routes that avoid sensitive areas, particularly those south of the Santee River and along U.S. Highway 17.

Based on public comments, as well as updates to RUS environmental policies and procedures, and the publication of a revised FMNF Land Management Plan, RUS determined that a supplemental draft EIS would be necessary to evaluate other reasonable corridors. This included two new options originating from the Jamestown Substation and Charity Substation. Also, in 2017, because of comments received from agencies and the general public, Central Electric commissioned, at RUS' request, an independent engineering study to evaluate and supplement the previously developed studies and assess the merit of the proposed alternatives based on need, impacts, and cost; and to offer additional insight and information that may be relevant to assessing each potential solution.

3.3 Supplemental Draft EIS

On August 30, 2019, RUS published an NOI/NOA announcing the availability of the supplemental draft EIS for the Project (84 FR 45720), which included new analysis of the Jamestown and Charity corridors and two of the original Belle Isle corridors that had previously been determined to have the least impacts (Options B and C). On September 17 and 19, 2019, RUS conducted public meetings at St. James-Santee Elementary-Middle School in McClellanville and at Jamestown Baptist Church Life Center, respectively.

RUS received comments from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USACE, National Marine Fisheries Service, USFWS, SCDNR, South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, The Village Museum, Coastal Conservation League, Santee Preservation Society, White Oak Forestry Company, Central Electric, Berkeley Electric Cooperative, and 100 individuals. All public comments received on the Supplemental Draft EIS and RUS's responses, , are provided in Appendix E of the final EIS.

As expressed previously for the draft EIS, public comments on the supplemental draft EIS overwhelmingly opposed the Belle Isle routes due to concerns about both historical and environmental resources. Commenters also noted potential adverse impacts on the biologically diverse FMNF; while some commenters were opposed to any route that would traverse through the FMNF, others were supportive of following existing ROWs across NFS lands. Also, some commenters advocated for exploring non-transmission line alternatives such as solar and battery storage solutions.

3.4 Changes from Supplemental Draft EIS to Final EIS

As discussed above in section 3.3, the public comments were overwhelmingly opposed to crossing the Santee River via the proposed Belle Isle corridors, two of which had been retained for further analysis in the supplemental draft EIS. Therefore, the Belle Isle corridors were omitted from analysis in the final EIS.

The supplemental draft EIS analyzed the Jamestown and Charity alternatives. Both options followed alongside Halfway Creek Road for approximately 3.2 miles between Honey Hill and Shulerville Road because the roadway would provide easy access for Project construction, operations and maintenance. However, the USFS and Gaddy (2017) identified several ecologically sensitive Carolina Bays on NFS lands in this area. Therefore, after publication of the supplemental draft EIS, the alignment of the Proposed Action and alternatives were modified to follow the existing Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line rather than Halfway Creek Road.

In 2023, to further avoid and minimize Project impacts, Central Electric performed a supplemental routing of the transmission corridor across private lands, which is provided as Appendix D of the final EIS. A routing team identified feasible transmission line corridors within three locations along the corridor with concentrations of private lands. An initial set of 103 study segments was reviewed and those with unacceptable constraints were eliminated, while others were refined based on avoidance criteria such as unevaluated NFS lands, buildings, cemeteries, historic sites, and residences. Fifty-nine segments were carried forward for further evaluation, which were linked to form end-to-end alternative corridors for analysis. To evaluate alternative corridors, a comprehensive suite of metrics was then calculated for each alternative corridor, covering six categories of routing factors, including: (1) constructability/engineering, (2) water resources, (3) wildlife habitat, (4) cultural resources, (5) built environment, and (6) land use/land cover. These metrics were determined based on the routing team's experience in previous successful transmission line studies, the routing considerations specified by RUS' (2015) *Design Manual for High Voltage Transmission Lines*, and the EPRI-GTC (2006) *Overhead Electric Transmission Line Siting Methodology*. Each routing factor was assigned a weight from 1 to 10 based on the importance of the metric to siting the transmission line. Weights were determined based on the routing team's experience and stakeholder input from past transmission projects in coastal South Carolina. This supplemental routing on private lands identified a more direct corridor between the Jamestown and McClellanville Substations that reduces the overall Project impacts. The preference for this new alignment is captured by including it as part of the Proposed Action (Jamestown corridor) in the final EIS, as it takes a more direct route across private lands between Shulerville and Honey Hill. The original Jamestown corridor, which extends further south in this area, became the Jamestown Alternative, and also included the modification discussed above to follow the existing Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line rather than Halfway Creek Road, and modifications to the alignment on private lands in the vicinity of the Jamestown and McClellanville substations. Likewise, the Chairty Alternative was revised to include the modification discussed above to follow the existing Winyah-Charity 230-kV transmission line rather than Halfway Creek Road, and to minimize potential impacts on private lands in the vicinity of the McClellanville Substation.

3.5 Final EIS

The NOA for the final EIS was published on October 18, 2024 in the Federal Register (89 FR 83833), in combination with legal announcements in two newspapers to inform the public of the availability of the final EIS and start of the 30-day public review period. This included The State (Columbia, SC) and The Post and Courier (Charleston, SC). The review period closed on December 2, 2024.

3.6 Comments Received on the Final EIS

One comment letter and one email were received during the final EIS review period. These public comments and RUS's responses are provided in Table 4. In addition, one phone call was received from Southern Environmental Law Center on October 22, 2024, asking about when the public comment period started and if it started on Oct 18 when the NOA was published, or if the comment period had ended. RUS responded explaining that the comment period started on October 18, 2024 and would conclude on December 2.

Table 4. Agency Actions Necessary for Regulatory Compliance and Project Approval

Organization	Commenter Name, Title	Comment	Agency Action
Southern Environmental Law Center	Emily Wyche, Staff Attorney	Sent via email on October 24, 2024, asking if there was a comment period for the final EIS.	RUS responded on October 24, 2024 via email.
Southern Environmental Law Center	Monica (no last name provided)	Voicemail message received by RUS on October 22, 2024, questioning if the public comment period started on October 18 or if the comment period had ended.	RUS replied by leaving a voicemail message on October 23, 2024
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4	Ntale Kajumba, NEPA Section, Environmental Justice, Community Health, and Environmental Review Division	Letter sent via email on December 2, 2024. Acknowledges the Project purpose of improving reliability in the McClellanville service area and indicated they had reviewed the evaluation of alternatives. The EPA understands that further refinement on the proposed ROW will be needed and recommend that, as the Project proceeds, every effort should be made to further reduce impacts to aquatic and other natural resources and implement best management practices.	RUS responded on December 2, 2024 via email, acknowledging receipt of the letter.

3.7 Changes from Final EIS to ROD

Based on RUS's review and response to public and agency comments received during the final EIS review period (see Section 3.5), no further changes to the final EIS are needed .

All public comments on the 2014 draft EIS and supplemental draft EIS were intended to be provided in Appendix E of the final EIS; due to an oversight, comments on the 2014 draft EIS were not attached to the final EIS and have been added as Appendix A of this ROD. Responses to the 2014 comments and reflect the routes being analyzed in the 2014 draft EIS and are not reflective of the corridors analyzed in the final EIS.

In preparing this ROD, some errors in the final EIS were identified after the issuance of the NOA on October 18, 2024 (89 FR 83833). Table 5 provides a summary of edits to the final EIS that are necessary to more accurately describe the Project and associated environmental impact analysis. These revisions are

minor and do not change the alternatives or the analysis of effects on the human environment and therefore, is no need to supplement the NEPA analysis or issue a new ROD. Attached as Appendix B of this ROD are ten errata sheets with revisions highlighted, where new text has been added with bold font and deleted text has been marked with strike-through. These revised pages will replace the original pages in the final EIS, dated September 2024.

Table 5. Summary of Revisions to the Final EIS

PDF Page Nos.	Document Page Nos.	Revision
21 65	ES-5 2- 12	The length that the proposed Charity Alternative was revised from 31 to 31.1 to be more accurate and consistent with elsewhere in the document.
21 65 265	ES-5 2-12 3-176	The length that the proposed Charity Alternative would follow the existing Winyah Charity 230-kV ROW was revised from 18 miles to 20.9 miles to be consistent with elsewhere in the document.
PDF Page Nos.	Document Page Nos.	Revision
29 216	ES-13 3- 127	The impacts of the proposed action to soils and geology was revised to more accurately state that the frequency of maintenance-related soil impacts would be occasional rather than continual because new surfaces will be limited to substation components and transmission power poles only.
30	ES-14	The intensity of impacts on transportation was revised from "moderate" to "low" to align with the intensity level described in section 3.11.12, <i>Transportation, Environmental Effects</i> .
64 65 265 285	2-11 2-12 3-176 3-196	The description of the Jamestown corridor and Jamestown Alternative were revised to more accurately describe the length of existing roads and ROWs that they would follow, and an error was corrected where it stated that both would follow alongside Halfway Creek Road and SC Highway 41, which they would not.
173	3-84	Table 3.3-8 was revised to correct the length that each alternative would be parallel to another linear feature including roads, railroads, and utility ROWs.
203	3-114	The percentage of the Charity Alternative that would parallel existing utility ROW was revised from 58 percent to 67 percent, consistent with the above edit to Table 3.3-8.

4.0 SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

4.1 Environmental Effects of the Selected Alternative

Impacts of RUS's selected alternative are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary of Effects

Resource	Proposed Action (Selected Alternative)

Water Resources	The transmission line will cross 10 streams and 9 waterbodies, as identified by the National Hydrography database, and 2.8 miles of wetlands, as identified by the National Wetland Inventory. Wetlands will be delineated and protective riparian buffers would be marked prior to construction; wetlands would be spanned up to 600 feet, where feasible; and impacts will be avoided to the maximum extent practicable, including compliance with any the USFS (2017) standards for riparian management zones on NFS lands, and the terms and conditions of a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit. There will be short- and long-term, moderate-intensity impacts on surface waters would occur due to placement of construction mats, potential sedimentation from ground disturbance while placing transmission line poles, and clearing land within the ROW that will convert wetlands from forested to nonforested. There will be short-term, low-intensity impacts where the transmission line traverses a small area of the 100-year floodplain of Wambaw Creek and Echaw Creek, but no long-term impacts will occur because there will be no change in elevation and floodplains will be restored to preconstruction contours when construction is complete.
Biological Resources	The transmission line construction will result in approximately 0.15 to 0.18 acres of permanent vegetation loss from 233 to 280 transmission line monopoles and 2.14 to 2.57 acres of temporary impacts for the placement of temporary 20-foot by 20-foot construction pads around each structure. There will be short- and long-term, moderate-intensity impacts on vegetation due to disturbance by heavy machinery and clearing of the ROW during construction. Forest communities within the ROW would be permanently converted to herbaceous and shrub vegetation and some forested wetlands would be cleared. A 75-foot ROW would encompass approximately 200 acres of forest, although micro-siting and reductions in ROW width alongside existing ROWs would reduce clearing impacts, minimizing conversion of forested ecosystems and associated habitat alteration. Low-intensity impacts will result from habitat fragmentation. The project may introduce nonnative invasive plants but the potential for their establishment and spread will be minimized by
Resource	Proposed Action (Selected Alternative)
	implementing a non-native invasive plant management plan on NFS lands that is consistent with the USFS' desired conditions and objectives. Short-term, low- to moderate-intensity impacts on wildlife will occur due to disturbance from human presence, noise, and construction activity within and near the transmission line ROW. The permanent loss of approximately 200 acres of forest habitat will be long-term and moderate-intensity to species that rely on forests, although species that prefer grassland, shrublands, and forest edges will benefit. Effects on birds related to line collisions or electrocutions may be long-term and moderate-intensity, but will be minimized by following relevant guidelines and taking appropriate measures to avoid and mitigate impacts. The project will have <i>no effect</i> or is <i>not likely to adversely affect</i> federally listed species in the project vicinity, with the exception of the red-cockaded woodpecker, northern long-eared bat, and tricolored bat due to ROW clearing. Impacts will be avoided and minimized with time-of-year restrictions, preconstruction surveys, and compliance with the reasonable and prudent measures of the USFWS' biological opinion, and terms and conditions that implement them.
Soils and Geology	There will be short-term, low-intensity impacts due to the displacement of soil and rock during construction activities, alteration of geologic features due to earth-moving activities and alteration of topography. No geologic impacts would occur. Soil impacts from Project operations and maintenance will be limited to occasional soil compaction along access areas and long-term operations areas (e.g., the McClellanville Substation).
Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions	There will be short-term, low-intensity impacts due to a temporary increase in pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions from equipment exhaust during construction, exhaust from vehicles traveling to and from the Project, and fugitive dust from soil disturbance.

Cultural and Paleontological Resources	There are two known resources along the proposed transmission line: the NRHP-listed Old Georgetown Road and the NRHP-eligible Honey Hill Fire Tower; and several unevaluated archaeological sites. The Project will have a direct, visual impact on the Old Georgetown Road and Honey Hill Fire Tower. Mitigation for this impact will be worked out through the Section 106 consultation process under the PA. Once the project ROW has been finalized, additional cultural resource surveys and studies surveys will identify the boundaries of historic sites, and if necessary due to potential impacts, will determine if those sites are eligible for listing on the NRHP and if any mitigation measures will be necessary. In coordinating Section 106 compliance, RUS has developed a project-specific PA among RUS, USFS, and the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office. Any historic sites will be spanned and protected during construction when feasible, as identified in the PA. The PA will have provisions for the treatment of any post-review structure discoveries.
Visual Resources	There will be long-term, high-intensity impacts to visual resources where the proposed transmission line follows alongside SC Highway 45 for 7.5 miles, alongside Tiger Corner Road for 6.8 miles, as there would be no vegetation buffer between the road and new transmission line ROW. The new line and structures would be visible to local residents, recreational users, and commuters for over half of the corridor.
Socioeconomics	There will be short-term, low-intensity impacts due to temporary employment and economic activity, and a small temporary increase in public service and housing demand. There will be long-term, negligible impacts due to loss of approximately 200 acres of timber from ROW clearing.
Transportation	There will be short-term, low-intensity impacts due to increased traffic during construction and potential road and lane closures and traffic detours, including roads on the USFS Road 157 (Tiger Corner Road).
Health and Safety	There will be short-term, low-intensity impacts due to potential contaminant exposure during construction and risks to worker safety during construction. Hazardous waste would be managed in accordance with applicable regulatory requirements. No long-term risk associated with fire and severe weather, or increases in potential electromagnetic field (EMF) exposure.
Noise	There will be short-term, low-intensity impacts due to a temporary increase in noise levels from construction activities and Project traffic, and long-term, low-intensity impacts from Project operations and maintenance. No significant impacts to any receptors.

4.2 Environmental Commitments and Mitigation Measures

The impact analysis for each resource assumes successful implementation of the environmental commitments that are proposed as part of any action alternative. Table 7 lists the environmental commitments to be implemented by the Applicant during the construction and operation of the Project. These environmental commitments are required by this ROD and will be included in, and thereby enforced by, applicable permits, authorizations, and orders issued by federal and state agencies. These commitments may be revised as permits, authorizations, and orders actions are reviewed and issued, if deemed appropriate by the various decisionmakers. It should be noted that additional environmental commitments, mitigation measures, and/or best management practices (BMPs) may be required through other permits issued by state or federal agencies.

Table 7. Environmental Commitments

ID	Mitigation Measure
Water Resources	
WR-1	Avoid impacts to wetlands to the maximum extent practicable. Wetlands will be delineated within the selected corridor and a USACE permit or Nationwide Permit verification letter will be obtained prior to conducting any work in waters of the U.S.

WR-2	Store construction equipment, fuels, chemicals, and materials outside of streams and wetlands.
WR-3	Use construction mats for all wetland crossings.
WR-4	Comply with riparian buffers required by the state and clearly mark all wetland and buffer boundaries along the ROW prior to the implementation of other perimeter BMPs and commencement of construction activities.
WR-5	Span wetland and riparian areas where possible. Low-water crossings may be used to access the ROW during construction and will be designed so as not to inhibit fish passage or create discharges.
WR-6	Install BMPs, such as silt fences, at all stream crossings and along the borders of wetlands to prevent sedimentation.
WR-7	Locate pole structures outside wetland areas where feasible.
WR-8	Comply with all requirements of state permits for storm water discharges for construction activities.
WR-9	Develop an SWPPP (Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan) prior to construction
WR-10	Prevent accidental spillage of contaminants, debris, hazardous liquids, or other pollutants into streams, waterways, lakes, land, and underground aquifers. Such pollutants and waste include, but are not restricted to, refuse, garbage, cement, concrete, sanitary waste, industrial waste, oil, and other petroleum products, aggregate processing tailing, mineral salts, and thermal pollution.
WR-11	Develop a hazardous materials management and spill prevention plan to address storage, use, transportation, and disposal of hazardous materials.
WR-12	Develop an emergency response plan for accidental spills.
WR-13	Promptly clean up spills or equipment leaks to prevent materials from entering surface water.
WR-14	Schedule construction in river crossing areas during low water periods or winter, if feasible.
WR-15	Install culverts where necessary to accommodate the estimated peak flow of the stream. Disturbance to the stream banks will be minimized during construction and all disturbed areas will be regraded to original contours and revegetated in accordance with the mitigation measures listed for soil/vegetation resources. Annual monitoring will ensure the culverts are functioning as designed.
WR-16	Remove excavated material and other debris from flood-prone areas to prevent debris from clogging culverts or bridges and altering water flow and flood patterns.
WR-17	Do not stockpile excavated materials near or on stream banks or waterway perimeters unless the stockpile is protected from high water or stormwater runoff.
WR-18	Ensure wastewater discharge from construction operations does not enter streams, waterways, wetlands, or other aquatic resources without the appropriate permits.
WR-19	Avoid using fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides in or near surface waterbodies.

Biological Resources

BR-1	<u>If temporary access roads are required, restore them to their natural condition with native vegetation after</u>
ID	Mitigation Measure
	construction.
BR-2	Mark and secure holes drilled or excavated for foundation construction with temporary fencing if left unattended overnight to ensure safety for livestock, wildlife, and the public.
BR-3	Conduct construction operations to minimize unnecessary destruction, scarring, or defacing of natural surroundings, vegetation, trees, and native shrubbery.
BR-4	Develop a non-native invasive plant management plan addressing prevention, detection, and control of nonnative invasive plants during construction activities.
BR-5	Inspect and clean construction equipment for seeds before mobilizing to the Project area.
BR-6	Prior to clearing woody vegetation and trees during the migratory bird nesting season, complete a survey of the final ROW to identify existing stick nests. Tree-clearing crews will also be trained to stop work and notify Environmental staff if they encounter an unanticipated nest.
BR-7	Design the Project according to the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee's guidelines—APLIC (2006) and APLIC (2012)—for avian protection and collision risk mitigation.
BR-8	Comply with any reasonable and prudent measures, and/or terms and conditions of an incidental take statement issued by FWS during ESA section 7 consultation.

BR-9	Restore disturbed areas and construction staging areas upon completion to ensure surfaces drain naturally, blend with natural terrain, and are restored with native vegetation. Repair all destruction, scarring, and damage.
BR-10	Do not remove trees within 300 feet of active swallow-tailed kite nests or wood stork nesting colonies from April 1 through June 30 or until fledging is completed.
BR-11	Avoid suitable habitat for federally listed plants to the extent practicable. If suitable habitats cannot be avoided, species presence/absence surveys would be performed by a qualified biologist.
BR-12	Use optical ground wire or bird flight diverters in high bird use areas in consultation with USFWS to mitigate collision risks.
BR-13	Implement tree removal ¹ restrictions during specific periods: winter torpor (December 15 to February 15) and pup season (May 1 to July 15). Prioritize tree clearing during the following work windows: 1) July 16 to December 14 (first choice), (2) February 16 to March 31 (second choice), and (3) April 1 to April 30 (third choice).
BR-14	Avoid using herbicides on NFS lands unless approved by the USFS.
BR-15	Avoid construction activities within a 200-foot buffer around RCW cavity trees during the RCW nesting season (April 1 through July 31).

Soils and Geology

SG-1	Confine construction activities to the right-of-way (ROW) and around structure locations for transmission structures.
SG-2	Stockpile topsoil removed during construction and use it for reclamation following construction.
SG-3	Re-grade, stabilize, and revegetate all disturbed areas to match pre-construction conditions.
SG-4	While not anticipated to be necessary, design temporary access roads to follow existing land contours where practical to minimize erosion, rather than creating straight paths across the ROW.
SG-5	<u>Loosen compacted soils after construction to restore soil productivity and support agricultural operations.</u>
SG-6	Water will be applied on roads and disturbed areas to minimize dust, as needed.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

AQ-1	Enforce speed limits on local gravel roads during construction to reduce dust.
AQ-2	Locate staging areas as close to the construction site as possible to minimize driving distance.
AQ-3	Dispose of all waste materials properly at permitted waste disposal areas or landfills.
AQ-4	Do not burn or bury waste materials on the Right of Way (ROW).

Cultural, Historical, and Paleontological Resources

CHP-1	Conduct a cultural resource survey within the ROW for archaeology and the area of potential effects for aboveground resources before construction. Develop and implement mitigation measures as required by the Programmatic Agreement (PA).
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ID	Mitigation Measure
CHP-2	Span and protect archaeological sites during construction when feasible, as identified in the PA. Address any designs that cannot span archaeological resources with phased surveys and resolution of adverse effects, as necessary.
CHP-3	Brief all workers on protocols for cultural resource discoveries during construction. Prohibit workers from removing artifacts from the project area, as outlined in the PA.
CHP-4	Suspend all construction activities within a 50-foot radius if any archaeological resources are discovered, as specified in the PA.
Land Use	
LU-1	Provide a schedule of construction activities to all landowners who could be affected.
LU-2	Acquire appropriate permits and easements from federal or state land management agencies for portions of the ROW traversing public lands.

¹ USFWS has defined “tree removal” as cutting down, harvesting, destroying, trimming, or manipulating in any other way the trees, saplings, snags, or any other form of woody vegetation likely to be used by northern long-eared bats (81 FR 1900).

LU-3	Plan construction activities to minimize temporary disturbance, displacement of crops, and interference with agricultural activities.
LU-4	Construct access roads to the minimum width required for the passage of construction vehicles.
LU-5	Repair or replace fences, gates, and similar improvements that are removed or damaged during construction.
LU-6	Reclaim deep ruts after construction that may be hazardous to farming operations and equipment movement. Level, fill, and grade ruts, scars, and compacted soils from construction activities in productive hay or crop lands using scarifying, harrowing, disking, or other appropriate methods. Correct damage to ditches, tile drains, terraces, roads, and other land features, and restore land contours and facilities as nearly as practical to their original conditions.
LU-7	Use gates exclusively to discourage access to the ROW across NFS lands and use hedges and gates to discourage access to the ROW across other lands.
Socioeconomics	
SE-1	Contact landowners during construction to minimize short-term impacts on agriculture.
Transportation	
T-1	Coordinate conductor stringing across roadways with the SC State Department of Transportation.
T-2	Coordinate with the Federal Aviation Administration prior to construction if the preferred corridor is near an airfield before construction begins. Health and Safety
HS-1	Prepare a construction plan in accordance with the National Electrical Safety Code and Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations, as required by federal law, to ensure the safety of construction workers. The plan will include standards such as requirements for hearing protection, personal protective equipment, site access, chemical exposure limits, safe work practices, training program, and emergency procedures. The plan will also identify procedures should a spill occur or hazardous materials be discovered. The plan will be reviewed with fire department personnel and emergency services personnel to reduce risk of construction and operation activities interfering with emergency response or evacuation plans and procedures.
HS-2	Identify existing utilities and coordinate with their owners/managers prior to construction to protect both facilities and construction workers during crossings.
HS-3	Conduct vehicle fueling in compliance with procedures designed to minimize fire risks and fuel spills.
HS-4	Secure all construction areas at the end of each workday to protect equipment, materials, and discourage public access.
Noise	
N-1	Equip all construction equipment with sound-control devices no less effective than those provided on original equipment.
N-2	Ensure all internal combustion engines used in construction are equipped with mufflers and spark arresters to minimize noise.
N-3	Conduct construction activities between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. in residential areas

5.0 RUS DECISIONS AND RATIONALE FOR DECISIONS

RUS decisions must comply with all relevant state and federal environmental regulations. The regulations are summarized in Table 1.3-1 in the final EIS, and Section 1.3 of this ROD.

5.1 Decisions

This ROD documents findings specific to the Proposed Action (selected alternative).

RUS has made the following decisions:

- Based on an evaluation of the information and impact analyses presented in the final EIS, including the evaluation of all alternatives and in consideration of RUS's environmental policies and procedures (7 CFR 1970), RUS finds that the overall impact analysis and evaluation of reasonable alternatives are consistent with NEPA. In the final EIS, RUS, in cooperation with USFS and USACE, identifies measures proposed to minimize impacts as its preferred alternative. In this ROD, RUS identifies the final EIS preferred alternative as its selected alternative. This ROD concludes RUS's environmental review process in accordance with its environmental policies and procedures.
- A review and analysis of the selected alternative's justification, associated engineering studies, and preliminary financial information have led to RUS's concurrence with the selected alternative's purpose and need. RUS hereby decides that of the alternatives analyzed, it will move the Jamestown corridor forward in the application process.

RUS hereby agrees to the above, and should the Applicant apply to RUS for financing assistance for the proposal, the consideration of the Applicant's loan application may proceed. The following conditions apply:

- The Applicant will implement the selected alternative as described in this ROD, with further details as described for the preferred alternative in the final EIS. This includes a) those actions incorporated into the selected alternative to reduce or eliminate impacts, and b) any mitigation measures that the final EIS and this ROD state will be implemented.
- The Applicant will obtain and comply with all applicable local, state, and federal permits required for the construction and operation of the selected alternative.

5.2 Rationale and Compliance with Legal and Policy Mandates

This section explains how the selected alternative, as defined in the final EIS and in this ROD, satisfies RUS's statutory, regulatory, and policy mandates.

5.2.1 National Environmental Policy Act

In the final EIS, RUS has fully considered all reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Action and concluded that the construction and operation of the Proposed Action best meets the purpose and need of the Project. The agency has met the requirements of NEPA and agency policies and procedures for public involvement. This has included responses to requests for information from the public, including non-governmental organizations, federally recognized tribes, and federal and state agencies. The impacts, actions, and mitigation to reduce them are provided in the final EIS (and summarized in this ROD). The Applicant will be responsible for implementation of these measures with RUS (and any cooperating agencies) oversight.

5.2.2 National Historic Preservation Act and Tribal Government-to-Government Consultation

Consultation with the Tribal historic preservation officers, state historic preservation officers, and other consulting parties is documented in Section 3.4.1 of the Final EIS. Responses were received from tribal historic preservation officers with three tribes: the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, the Muscogee

(Creek) Nation, and the Catawba Indian Nation. Only the Catawba Indian Nation chose to become a consulting party, and in the end they did not comment on the EIS.

5.2.3 Endangered Species Act

RUS submitted a biological assessment to USFWS on July 14, 2024²¹. RUS determined in the biological assessment that the Proposed Action will have no effect on West Indian manatee, eastern black rail, piping plover, red knot, green sea turtle, Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, loggerhead sea turtle, monarch butterfly, seabeach amaranth, Atlantic sturgeon, and shortnose sturgeon. Consultation is not necessary for no effect determinations. RUS determined in the biological assessment that the Proposed Action may affect, is not likely to adversely affect wood stork, frosted flatwoods salamander, American chaffseed, pondberry, Canby's dropwort, and golden sedge. USFWS concurred with these determinations by email dated September 11, 2024. As described in Section 1.3.4, RUS engaged in formal consultation with USFWS due to a determination that the Project may affect, is likely to adversely affect the redcockaded woodpecker, northern long-eared bat, and tricolored bat. USFWS issued a biological opinion and conference opinion on December 11, 2024.

5.2.4 Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management

The Project will minimally impact the 100-year floodplain, crossing approximately 3,100 feet at Wambaw Creek, with up to five poles potentially within the floodplain; 1,100 feet at Mechaw Creek, with one pole potentially within the floodplain; and 2,100 feet at Echaw Creek, with up to three poles potentially within the floodplain. Although construction will not alter floodplain elevations, it will cause long-term changes to vegetation structure. Measures would effectively minimize any adverse impacts, including avoiding construction during high-water periods, limiting pesticide use, restricting equipment and chemical storage in floodplains, and implementing a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and associated BMPs.

5.2.5 Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands

The Applicant will design and construct the Project in a manner that avoids impacts to. Wetlands will be delineated and protective riparian buffers would be marked prior to construction; wetlands would be spanned up to 600 feet, where feasible; and impacts will be avoided to the maximum extent practicable, including compliance with any the USFS (2017) standards for riparian management zones on NFS lands, and the terms and conditions of a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit. Indirect impacts to wetland will be avoided through the implementation of sediment and erosion controls, or BMPs surrounding all wetland, stream, and waterbody boundaries. Within South Carolina, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit within the state for Stormwater Discharges from Construction Activities (Permit No. SCR100000) requires compliance with the provisions of the South Carolina Pollution Control Act (South Carolina Code Sections 48-1-10 et seq., 1976) and with the provisions of the Clean Water Act. Accordingly, appropriate BMPs would be identified in an SWPPP to control erosion and prevent sedimentation from construction sites, and stabilize all portions of the construction site with permanent cover following completion of work. Central Electric will file a Notice of Intent (application) with the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) prior to commencing clearing and construction activities.

6.0 RUS LOAN REVIEW

This ROD is not a decision on the Applicant's loan application and therefore not an approval of the expenditure of federal funds. The ROD concludes the agency's environmental review process in accordance with NEPA and agency policies and procedures (7 CFR 1970) and selects an alternative to move forward in the review process. The ultimate decision as to loan approval depends upon the conclusion of the environmental review process as well as financial and engineering analysis. Issuance of the ROD will allow these reviews to proceed, if the Applicant applies to RUS for financing assistance.

7.0 RIGHT TO ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL PROCESS)

This ROD concludes the agency's environmental review process pursuant to NEPA and the agency's environmental policies and procedures (7 CFR 1970). There are no provisions to appeal this decision. Legal challenges to the ROD may be filed in federal district court under the Administrative Procedures Act.

8.0 APPROVAL

This ROD is effective on signature.

Christopher A. McLean
Acting Administrator
Rural Utilities Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Date

9.0 CONTACT PERSON

For additional information on this ROD or the final EIS, please contact Suzanne Kopich, Environmental Protection Specialist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest, Washington, DC 20250; telephone: (202) 961-8514; or email: suzanne.kopich@usda.gov.

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