

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Navajo Tribal Utility Authority: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment for Public Review

PROJECT NAME: Red Mesa Solar Generation Facility and Access Road Project

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has issued an Environmental Assessment (EA) to meet its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) Environmental and Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) in relation to possible financial assistance for a proposed project by the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA). The project consists of constructing a 72-megawatt solar energy generation facility on 550.13 acres of land on the Navajo Nation, Red Mesa Chapter, San Juan County, Utah. NTUA plans to submit a loan application to U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) RUS to secure a direct loan to construct the solar facility and access road.

DATES: Written comments on this Notice must be received on or before 14 days from the issuance of this Notice.

ADDRESSES: To obtain copies of the EA or for further information, contact: Ms. Suzanne Kopich, Environmental Protection Specialist, USDA RUS/Rural Development, by telephone: (202) 961-8514; or e-mail: suzanne.kopich@usda.gov. Copies of the EA can be found on RUS's website at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments>

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed Project includes a 72-megawatt solar energy facility, interconnection facilities, an operations and maintenance building and an access road. The proposed access road is 40 feet wide by 66 feet long. Site preparation will include removal of sparse vegetation and grading followed by the installation of posts, inverter station foundations, panels and interconnection facilities. All solar components and facilities, operations and maintenance building and access road will be located within the 550.13 acre site on the Navajo Nation and fenced.

As part of its environmental review process, RUS must also take into account the effect of the proposed Project on historic properties in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulation, "Protection of Historic Properties" (36 CFR § 800). RUS has made a finding that this project has No Historic Properties Affected in accordance with 36 CFR § 800.4(d)(1). The Agency is using its procedures for public involvement under NEPA to meet its responsibilities to solicit and consider the views of the public during Section 106

review. Accordingly, comments submitted in response to the EA will be considered by agency decision makers under Section 106 as well as NEPA.

An environmental assessment that describes the project in detail and discusses its anticipated environmental impacts was prepared by NTUA. Alternatives considered by RUS and NTUA include a no action alternative, wind energy alternative, electric power transmission alternative and the proposed alternative of solar energy. Consistent with 7 CFR § 1970.5(b)(3)(iv)(C), RUS has completed an independent evaluation of the environmental information and analysis performed and accepted the documentation as the Agency's EA for the proposed project. The EA is available for public review at the addresses provided in this Notice. Questions and comments should be sent to Ms. Suzanne Kopich with RUS at the email address provided in this Notice. Comments on the EA should be provided to Suzanne Kopich within 14 days from the issuance of the public notice for the proposed project.

Should RUS, based on its EA, determine that the impacts of the construction and operation of the proposed project would have no significant environmental impact, it will prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Public notification of the FONSI would be published in a newspaper with circulation in the project area. Any final action by RUS related to the proposed project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal, state and local environmental laws and regulations, and completion of the environmental review requirements as prescribed in RUS's Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970).