

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utility Service

Unicom, Inc.: Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: Rural Utility Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: The Rural Utility Service (RUS), has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to a request for possible financing assistance to Unicom, Inc. (Unicom) for the construction of the AU Aleutian Project in Alaska.

FURTHER INFORMATION: To obtain copies of the EA and FONSI, or for further information, contact: Peter Steinour, Environmental Protection Specialist, USDA, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250, Telephone: (202) 692-5346, Email: peter.steinour@usda.gov. The EA and FONSI are also available for public review at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments>

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed project consists of an approximately 793-mile-long submarine fiber to bring fast internet service to over 9,000 people in six remote Alaska Native villages. The project would begin in Mill Bay (Kodiak) and would connect Larsen Bay, Chignik Bay, Sand Point, King Cove, Akutan, and Unalaska to an existing company-owned middle-mile fiber network. Unicom proposes to build fiber-to-the-premises local access networks in each of these newly connected communities and villages. The project would install approximately 47 miles of trenched fiber optic cables, 268 vaults (9 square-feet), six beach manholes (12 square-feet), and six new shelter pads (625 square-feet). Prefabricated communications shelter (approximately 25 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 10 feet high) would be installed adjacent to existing facilities (comprised of a fenced, gravel pad and communication equipment) in all locations except Larsen Bay and Chignik Bay where new sites would be developed.

The alternatives are discussed in the AU Aleutian EA. The RUS has reviewed and approved the EA for the proposed project.

The availability of the EA for public review was announced via notice in the following newspapers: Anchorage Daily News on July 31, August 1, and August 2, 2021 and Kodiak Daily Mirror on August 2, August 3, and August 4, 2021. The EA was also available for public review at the Unalaska City Library in Unalaska and Aleutians East Borough office and UAA Consortium Library in Anchorage, and the USDA website at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments>

Based on its EA, commitments made by Unicom, RUS has concluded that the project would have no significant impacts to water quality, wetlands, floodplains, land use, aesthetics, transportation, or human health and safety.

If implemented, the proposed project will convert approximately 0.096 acres of wetlands through placement of vaults, beach manholes and gravel pads in several areas of un-classified wetlands throughout the project area. Wetland impacts have been minimized by siting project features in developed/disturbed areas to the greatest extent possible. Section 3.3 of the EA describes wetland impacts in detail, and Chapter 5 of the EA describes the specific regional conditions that will be met in order to comply with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Nationwide Permit 57 and minimize wetland impacts. Due to the minimal amount of impacts, the USACE did not require compensatory mitigation for the wetlands fill.

The proposed project will have no adverse effect on historic resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Agency has also concluded that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat thereof. The proposed project would not disproportionately affect minority and/or low income populations.

No other potential significant impacts resulting from the proposed project have been identified. Therefore, RUS has determined that this FONSI fulfills its obligations under 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 USDA Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) for its action related to the project.

RUS is satisfied that the environmental impacts of the proposed project have been adequately addressed. RUS's federal action would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, and as such it will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its action related to the project.

Dated: September 9, 2021