

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

East Kentucky Power Cooperative, Inc.: 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: East Kentucky Power Cooperative, Inc. Boone-Williamstown 69 kilovolt (kV) Transmission Line Rebuild 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 East Kentucky Power Cooperative (EKPC). The project consists of rebuilding, operating, and maintaining the existing Boone – Williamstown 69 kV transmission line section within the existing 100-foot-wide right-of-way (ROW) easement in portions of Boone, Gallatin, and Grant Counties, Kentucky. EKPC plans to submit a loan application to U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) RUS to secure a direct loan to rebuild, operate and maintain the 69 kV transmission line.

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>, or physically at the Grant County Public Library, 201 Barnes Road, Williamstown, KY 41097

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: EKPC is proposing to rebuild, operate, and maintain the existing Boone – Williamstown 69 kV Transmission Line section within the existing 100-foot-wide ROW easement in portions of Boone, Gallatin, and Grant Counties, Kentucky. This transmission line section is approximately 28.4 miles in length and generally oriented north to south between the Boone 69 kV substation and Munk Junction, and west to east between Munk Junction and the Williamstown 69 kV substation. The Boone substation is located at the southeastern corner of the junction of Longbranch Road and Camp Ernst Road, approximately 3.5 miles south of Burlington in Boone County. Munk Junction is located on the west side of Kentucky Highway (KY) 36, approximately 0.1 mile southeast of Smokey Road in Grant County. The Williamstown substation is located on the south side of Barnes Road, 0.25 mile west of Interstate 75, approximately 1.75 miles west of Williamstown in Grant County.

The proposed action will be rebuilt within the existing 100-foot-wide ROW easement, which encompasses approximately 344.2 acres. The proposed action will consist of removing the existing transmission line and associated wood pole structures and constructing the new line in its place. This construction method will require significantly fewer structures than currently present. The existing transmission line is comprised of 263 wood-pole structures that have an approximate above ground height of 60 feet and a typical span length of 575 feet. The existing structures will be replaced with 212 steel-pole structures with an approximate height of 72 feet and a span of 715 feet.

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 Adverse Effect to historic properties or cultural resources 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 EKPC. Alternatives considered by RUS and EKPC include (a) no action alternative and (b) proposed action alternatives. 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 received on or before [insert date 14 days from the issuance of the public notice] or 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 newspapers 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).