

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Rural Development

**Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation:** Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment and 8-Step Process for Floodplain Management

**AGENCY:** Rural Utilities Service, United States Department of Agriculture

**ACTION:** Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment and 8-Step Process for Floodplain Management

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, is issuing an environmental assessment (EA) in connection with possible impacts related to a project being proposed by Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC), of Little Rock, Arkansas. The proposal is for construction of a 100-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) electrical power generation facility, an approximate 0.5 mile 34.5-kilovolt (kV) transmission line, and related interconnection equipment. The project will be constructed on property adjacent to the existing Carl E. Bailey Generating Station and southeast of the city of Augusta in Woodruff County, Arkansas. AECC has submitted an application to RUS for funding of the proposal. The project will result in placement of pilings in the 100 and 500-year floodplains. Notice is also given that RUS is conducting the 8-Step Process for floodplain management in accordance with Executive Order 11988 and USDA Departmental Regulation 9500-3.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Kristen Bastis, Archaeologist, Water and Environmental Programs, RUS USDA, 1400 Independence Ave, SW. Mail Stop 1570 Washington DC 20250, [Kristen.Bastis@usda.gov](mailto:Kristen.Bastis@usda.gov)

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** AECC proposes to construct the new Bailey Solar (also known as Woodruff County Solar) electrical power generating facility. The proposed project will be positioned on privately-owned land located southeast of the City of Augusta, Arkansas with a small portion within the city limits. The project area is currently used primarily for row crop agricultural production. Approximately 800 acres was surveyed for environmental and human constraints. Evaluation of an area larger than the anticipated footprint allows AECC to design the project to avoid such constraints/resources. The preliminary design for the project has a PV panel footprint of approximately 537 acres within a fenced area of approximately 630 acres. The project will also include an approximately 0.5-mile T-line right-of-way (ROW). The geographic coordinates to the approximate center of the site are Latitude 35.260034° and Longitude - 91.343868°. The project will include solar arrays installed within the boundary of the property. The facility will consist of the following major components, systems, and associated infrastructures: 1) solar panels and support structures/racking, 2) electrical collection system, 3) electrical invertors, 4) electrical transmission system, 5) access/internal road system, and 6) plant monitoring and control system.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Hazard Boundary Maps indicate that there are 100-year (areas subject to inundation by the 1-percent annual chance flood event) and 500-year (areas subject to inundation by the 0.2-percent annual chance flood event) floodplains located in the project area.

Executive Order 11988 outlines an 8-Step Decision Making Process for floodplain impacts which is currently underway by AECC and RUS. In accordance with Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and USDA Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy, the purpose of this notice is to inform the public of this proposed conversion or effect and request

comments concerning the proposal, alternative sites or actions that would avoid these impacts, and methods that could be used to minimize these impacts.

GBMc & Associates, an environmental consultant, prepared an EA for RUS that describes the project, assesses the proposed project's environmental impacts, and summarizes as applicable any mitigation measures used to minimize environmental effects.

If implemented, the proposed project will result in placement of pilings (mounting structures/poles for solar arrays) in floodplains. AECC estimates an aggregate piling footprint of less than one-tenth of an acre in the 100-year floodplain and less than two-tenths of an acre in the 500-year floodplain. These pilings are located in the southwest corner of the property, adjacent to the unnamed tributary that bisects the property, and adjacent to Caney Creek in the northwest corner of the property.

A Floodplain Use Permit (FUP) is required for any changes to land in a special flood hazard area and an Elevation Certificate is required for new buildings and substantial improvements in all identified Special Flood Hazard Areas. The Flood Control District reviews each permit application to ensure that it complies with current Woodruff County floodplain regulations and to determine if there may be flood-related concerns.

RUS has conducted an independent evaluation of the EA and believes that it accurately assesses the impacts of the proposed project. No significant impacts are expected as a result of the construction of the project.

The EA is available for review on RUS's website in 508 compliant PDF format at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments>

A physical copy of the EA is available for review at the following locations:

Augusta/Woodruff County Library 201 Mulberry Street Augusta, AR 72006-2633 (870) 347-5331	McCrary Branch Library 115 East Edmonds Avenue McCrary, AR 72101 (870) 731-0150
Cotton Plant Branch Library 124 Main Street Cotton Plant, AR 72036 (870) 459-1063	Woodruff Electric Cooperative Corporation 779 Highway 64 East Augusta, AR 72006 (870) 347-2419

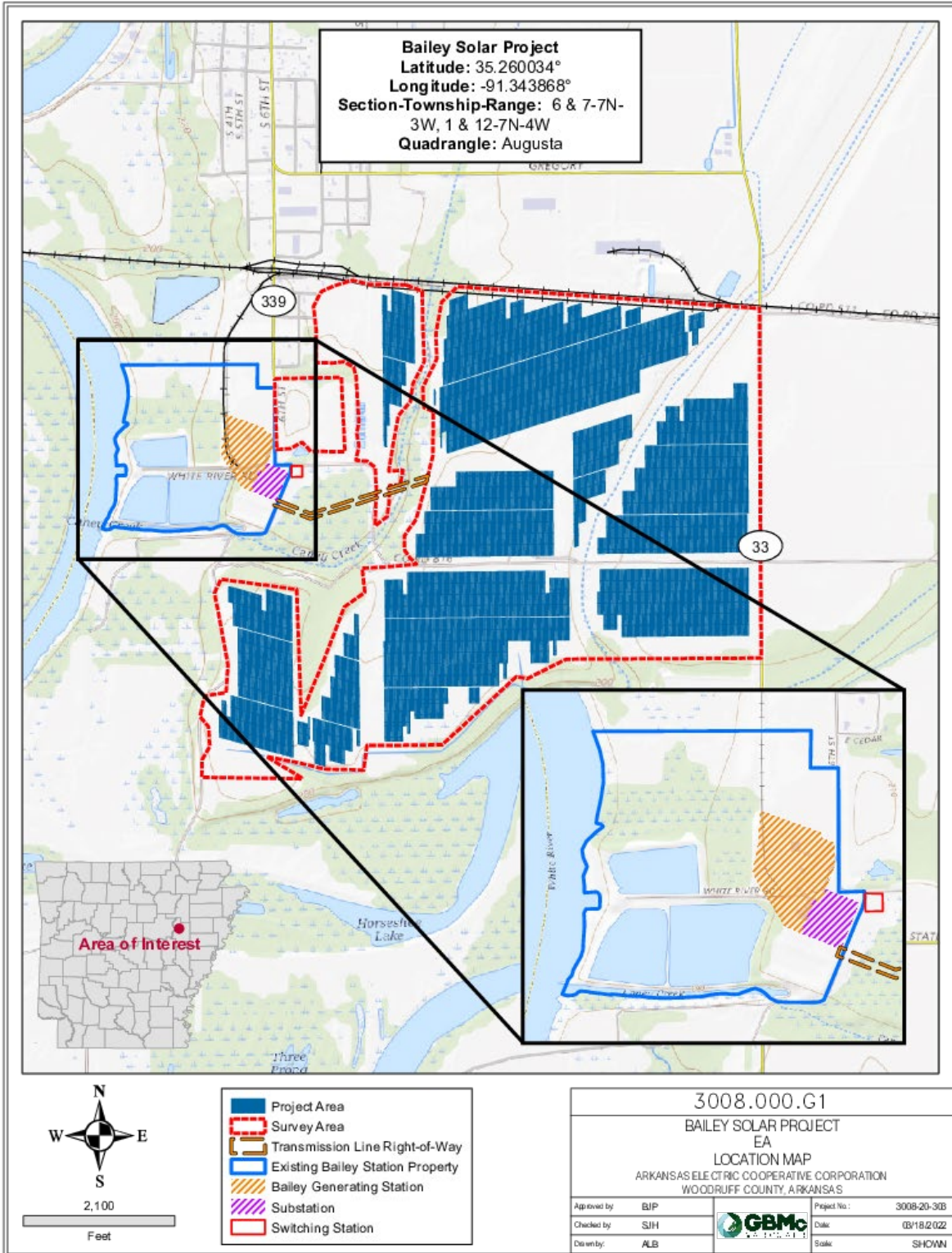
Questions and comments should be sent to Kristen Bastis, RUS via email at [Kristen.Bastis@usda.gov](mailto:Kristen.Bastis@usda.gov).

The mailing address is: Rural Utilities Service, Environment and Engineering Department, Water and Environmental Programs, Rural Development United States Department of Agriculture Mail Stop 1570, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W. Washington, DC 20250.

RUS will accept questions and comments on the EA including the floodplain proposal for 14 days from the date of publication of this notice. However, comments mailed directly to the Agency are discouraged during the COVID 19 period due to the potential for delayed receipt. RUS cannot guarantee receipt of hard copy comments in time for consideration.

Any final action by RUS related to the proposed project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal environmental laws and regulations and completion of environmental review procedures as prescribed by 7 CFR Part 1970, Environmental Policies and Procedures.

A general location map of the proposed project is shown.



Dated: March 21, 2022