

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment; Recirculation, Adoption, and Supplement of the NC 12 Replacement of Herbert C. Bonner Bridge Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA

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

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has adopted and supplemented the NC 12 Replacement of Herbert C. Bonner Bridge Environmental Assessment (EA) to meet its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and RUS's Environmental and Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) in relation to possible financial assistance for the proposed electric utility relocation activities associated with Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative (Cape Hatteras Electric). The project consists of completing substation improvements and relocating approximately 3.2 miles of 115 kV line in association with NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s improvements to NC Route 12 (Phase I, Bonner Bridger) in Dare County, NC. Cape Hatteras Electric plans to request financial assistance from RUS for its proposed utility work. RUS may

consider a funding request, thereby making it an undertaking subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), 16 USC 470(f), and its implementing regulation, “Protection of Historic Properties” (36 CFR Part 800).

DATES: A copy of the EA and its supplement may be viewed on the web at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/publications/environmental-studies/assessments>. Written comments on this Notice must be received on or before Thursday, September 7, 2017 at 5:00 PM (EST). Please address comments to: Ms. Kellie Kubena, Director, RUS/WEP/EES, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Mail Stop 1570, Room 2237-S, Washington, DC 20250-1570. Comments may also be submitted by e-mail to: alexandria.anderson@wdc.usda.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Lauren Rayburn, Environmental Scientist, USDA/Rural Utilities Service by telephone: (202) 695-2540 or e-mail: lauren.rayburn@wdc.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Cape Hatteras Electric proposes to make substation improvements to the Oregon Inlet Point of Delivery (POD) Substation located off NC 12 and construct approximately 3.2 miles of 115 kV line. Substation improvements would require expanding the facility’s fence line by 15 feet to the south; installing a temporary timber mat road up to 500 feet in length to access the substation from Oregon Inlet Road; and installing temporary matting around the substation to stage work activities. Construction of the 3.2 mile, 115 kV line would occur primarily within

NCDOT right-of-way (ROW) along NC 12 and would be completed in three stages: (1) installation of approximately 1,645 linear feet of underground cable from the Oregon Inlet POD Substation's North End Riser continuing south to the northern end wall of the New Bonner Bridge; (2) aerial attachment of approximately 2.8 miles of 115 kV cable to the New Bonner Bridge; and (3) installation of approximately 370 to 382 linear feet of underground cable and overhead line beginning at the South End Riser located at the Oregon Inlet Lifeboat Station and continuing north to the southern end wall of the New Bonner Bridge. The above line activities would be located on the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and within permitted NCDOT ROW associated with NC 12.

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. Pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.2(d)(3), 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 and its supplement will be considered by agency decision makers under Section 106 as well as NEPA.

Because the proposed project may involve action in wetlands or floodplains, this Notice also serves as a notice of proposed wetland and/or floodplain action in accordance with Executive Orders 11988 and 11990. The EA assesses effects to wetlands and includes a statement of findings.

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 environmental laws and regulations and completion of the environmental review procedures as prescribed by 7 CFR Part 1970, Environmental Policies and Procedures.

Dated: August 23, 2017