**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**Rural Utilities Service**

**Oglethorpe Power Corporation: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment**

**AGENCY:** Rural Utilities Service, USDA

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

**SUMMARY:** The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has issued an Environmental Assessment (EA) to meet its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and RUS’ Environmental and Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) in relation to possible financial assistance for a proposed project by Oglethorpe Power Corporation (Oglethorpe Power). The project consists of making software and hardware upgrades at its existing Chattahoochee Energy Facility, a gas-fired combined-cycle power generating facility, on Liberty Church Road in Heard County at coordinates 33.4070°N; 85.0387°W near Franklin, Georgia. Oglethorpe Power may request that RUS provide financial assistance for the project.

**DATES:** Written comments on this Notice must be received on or before November 25, 2020.

**ADDRESSES:** To obtain copies of the EA or for further information, contact: Mr. Dennis Rankin, Environmental Protection Specialist, USDA/Rural Utilities Service via e-mail: ***dennis.rankin@usda.gov***. A copy of the EA may be viewed at the agency’s website: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments> or physically at the Heard County Public Library at 564 Main Street, Franklin, GA 30217.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Oglethorpe Power proposes to install software and hardware upgrades at its existing Chattahoochee Energy Facility (Facility), a 502 megawatt (MW) gas-fired combined-cycle power generating facility, on Liberty Church Road in Heard County at coordinates 33.4070°N; 85.0387°W near Franklin, Georgia. The Facility’s Combustion Turbine Upgrades Project (Project) would increase the current generation capacity of the Facility to approximately 525 MW. This projected capacity increase is based on 59-degree Fahrenheit conditions and will vary slightly under differing ambient temperatures. The Project will help reduce the overall cost per megawatts (MW) of power generated and allow the Facility’s gas turbines to continue to operate at reduced power during times of low demand with less frequent shutdowns and subsequent restarts once demand increases.

As part of its broad environmental review process, RUS must also take into account the effect of the 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 Part 800). RUS has made a finding that this project has “No Potential to Effect” historic properties or cultural resources because it does not involve ground disturbing activities and all activities are undertaken within the existing facility.

An environmental assessment that describes the project in detail and discusses its anticipated environmental impacts was prepared by Oglethorpe Power and Burns & McDonnell Engineering Company, Inc. 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 RUS at the mailing or e-mail addresses provided in this Notice. RUS should receive written comments on the EA on or before November 25, 2020 to ensure that they are considered in its environmental impact determination.

Should RUS, based on its EA, determine that the impacts 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).