

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Development

Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation: 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 Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC) for the construction of the Bailey Solar Project (also known as the Woodruff County Solar Project) in Woodruff County, Arkansas.

FURTHER INFORMATION: To obtain copies of the EA and FONSI, or 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. 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 construction of a 100-megawatt solar photovoltaic electrical power generation facility, an approximate 0.5 mile 34.5-kilovolt 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. Alternatives considered by RUS and AECC include: No action; action alternative (the preferred alternative); and alternatives eliminated from further consideration. Regarding the action alternative, RUS would consider financing the proposed Project, and AECC would construct the Bailey Solar Project. The alternatives are discussed in the Bailey Solar Project 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 newspaper: Woodruff County Monitor on March 23 and 30, 2022. A 14-day comment period was announced in the newspaper notices. The EA was also available for public review at the USDA Rural Development website, as well as three Woodruff County libraries and the Woodruff Electric Cooperative Corporation office in Augusta, Arkansas. No comments were received by RUS or AECC regarding the Project.

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

RUS has assessed the environmental impacts of this proposal and determined that the location of the placement of pilings (mounting structures/poles for solar arrays) in floodplains will effect 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 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.

In accordance with Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and USDA Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy, the Agency is notifying the interested public of this land conversion. It has been determined that there is no practicable alternative to avoiding this conversion or effect and that there is a significant need for the proposal. The use of pilings will not alter the hydrology or other beneficial qualities of the floodplain. No comments were received during the public comment period.

The proposed project will have no adverse effect on 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 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 proposed project.

Dated: April 11, 2022