

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY

Proposed Marshland-Briggs Road (Q-1D) 161 kV Rebuild Project

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS) announces the availability of an Environmental Assessment (EA), which was prepared to meet RUS responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 7 CFR 1794 related to providing financial assistance to Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) for the proposed Marshland - Briggs Road (Q-1D) 161 kilovolt (kV) Rebuild Project (Project). The EA addresses potential impacts associated with the construction and operation of the proposed action and the no action alternative.

The proposed Project consists of replacing structures and upgrading conductor along approximately 13 miles of DPC's existing 70-mile 161 kV single-circuit transmission line (referred to as Q-1) in Trempealeau and La Crosse counties. The proposed Project crosses the Black River floodplain, which includes floodplain forest, streams, and emergent wetlands; approximately 0.3 miles of the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuges owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and approximately 0.9 miles of the Van Loon Wildlife Area owned by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). The proposed Project would be constructed within the existing 80 foot right-of-way (ROW); however, the ROW will be narrowed to 65 feet (32.5 feet on either side of the existing ROW) for the 3-mile section that crosses the Black River floodplain in order to reduce impacts related to maintaining a wider cleared ROW and allow for part of the existing ROW to revert to native vegetation as requested by the USFWS and WDNR.

The proposed Project is needed so that DPC can continue to provide reliable electric service to the area. Originally constructed in 1950, the transmission line is reaching the end of its service life with increased outages, increased maintenance costs, and low reliability during contingencies. The proposed Project is located in Sections 7, 8, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, and 25 of Township 18 North and Range 9 West; Sections 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, and 13 of Township 17 North and Range 8 West. Construction of the proposed Project is scheduled to take place from August through December 2015, which is the earliest timeframe that would avoid impacts on sensitive resources, including protected species, surface waters and wetlands.



In upland areas, the new structures that will be used to replace the existing 161 kV transmission line will be a combination of H-frame steel structures (approximately 65 to 80 feet tall with a span of approximately 500-700 feet between structures), single-pole steel structures (average of 90 feet tall with an average span of 770 feet between structures), and dead-end steel structures (approximately 60 to 80 feet tall used in 4 locations where construction phases begin and end). Access to the structures would be temporary overland access crossing existing or new easements using entrances from local roads, field roads, and private driveways (where permitted by the landowner).

In crossing the Black River floodplain, the new structures that will be used to replace the existing structures will be Y-frame steel structures used to minimize potential impacts related to birds, vegetation, wetlands, and floodplains. These structures will be an average of 65 feet to remain at or below the average tree height and an average span of 730 feet between structures). Within the Black River floodplain, a heavy-lift helicopter will be used to transport and install structures and transport associated construction equipment to the construction site to help reduce impacts. Permanent effects associated with construction would be limited to the footprint of the transmission structures, which are anticipated to total approximately 0.04 acres

The transmission line, as proposed, will be located within wetlands and 100-year floodplains. Construction of the proposed transmission line will result in up to 264.6 square feet of permanent disturbance within 100-year floodplains and 264.6 square feet of permanent disturbances within wetlands. DPC has considered a variety of alternatives for the Project, including taking no action, alternative routes, alternative design and construction methods, and alternative structure types. DPC believes that there is no practicable alternative that will avoid locating transmission structures in wetlands and 100-year floodplains.

AVAILABILITY: The EA can be reviewed at, or obtained from, DPC, 3200 East Avenue South, La Crosse, WI 54602; Holmen Area Library, 103 State Street, Holmen, WI 54636; Trempealeau Library, 11455 Fremont Street, Trempealeau, WI 54661; or from the RUS Engineering and Environmental Staff, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 1571 Room 2242, Washington, D.C. 20250. The EA will be available electronically for review at: www.rurdev.usda.gov/UWP-ea.htm, <http://www.dairynet.com/environment/>.

COMMENT PERIOD: RUS is requesting substantive comments on the proposed action. Comments on the EA should be submitted in writing within 30 days of the publication date of this notice to ensure that RUS, prior to making its environmental impact determination, considers them. The deadline for submitting comments to the RUS regarding the EA is April 15, 2015, at the address provided in this notice.

At the end of the comment period, RUS will issue a decision for the proposed action. A notice announcing the decision will be published in local newspapers. Any final action by RUS related to the proposed action 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 the RUS Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1794).

PLEASE SUBMIT COMMENTS TO: Stephanie Strength, Environmental Protection Specialist, USDA Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 1571, Room 2242, Washington, D.C. 20250. Comments can also be submitted via email to: Stephanie.strength@wdc.usda.gov. For Project-specific questions, please contact: Chuck Thompson (DPC), 608-787-1432, or send questions to cat@dairynet.com.