

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Keys Ferry 115/25 kV Substation Construction &
Ola-Ingram 115 kV Transmission Line Modification
Butts County, GA**

**RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE
U.S. Department of Agriculture**

**Georgia Transmission Corporation
Georgia 110**

**Prepared by:
Engineering and Environmental Staff
Rural Utilities Service**

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A. INTRODUCTION

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) expects to receive a request for financial assistance from the Georgia Transmission Corporation (GTC) to construct the proposed Keys Ferry 115/25 kV Substation Construction & Ola-Ingram 115 kV Transmission Line Modification Project in Butts County, GA (the proposed Project). RUS may finance the proposed Project, thereby making it an action subject to review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act, and all applicable federal environmental law and regulation. RUS determined that the proposal would require an Environmental Assessment (EA), in accordance with RUS's Environmental Policies and Procedures, 7 CFR Part 1794. RUS conducted an independent evaluation of the EA prepared by GTC, concurred with its scope and content, and adopted it as the agency's EA. RUS has evaluated the proposed Project's purpose and need, reasonable alternatives, and potential impacts to the environment, and has concluded that the proposed Project will not have a significant impact on the human environment.

B. PURPOSE AND NEED

GTC is a not-for-profit electric transmission cooperative that builds, maintains, and owns electric power transmission facilities to serve its Georgia Electric Membership Corporations (EMCs). Snapping Shoals Electric Membership Corporation (SSEMC), an EMC served by GTC, is currently experiencing heavy loading at three (3) transformers in the southern portion of their territory and has forecasted several circuit overloads in the area. The proposed Project will provide additional capacity and ensure reliable service to SSEMC's territory.

C. PROPOSED ACTION

GTC has proposed the construction of the Keys Ferry 115/25 kV Substation in Butts County, GA to provide the needed additional capacity. GTC will acquire 3.9 acres of land to site the substation, and will disturb 3.6 acres to provide a level substation pad and drainage controls. Construction activities required to integrate the substation into the existing distribution network will all occur within GTC's existing easement for the Ola-Ingram 115 kV Transmission Line, including the installation of two (2) new concrete poles, the enhancement of an existing path to serve as the access road to the substation, and the construction of 800-feet of triple-circuit distribution line. In addition to those actions directly related to the construction of the substation, SSEMC will upgrade and convert 6-miles of existing distribution line to accommodate the new delivery point and relieve overloads and low voltage problems. These distribution projects were not discussed in the EA given that the locations of the upgrades are not yet identified and they will not be funded by GTC (SSEMC will be financing the upgrades). However, should SSEMC elect to pursue financing from RUS the upgrades would qualify as categorical exclusions pursuant to 7 CFR § 1794.21(b)(15).

D. ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED

Electrical Alternatives

The EA assessed three electrical alternatives, including the no action alternative, an upgrading alternative and a new construction alternative (the proposed Project). Under the no action alternative, RUS would not provide financial assistance and/or GTC would not construct the proposed Project. This alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the proposal, and GTC would fail to fulfill its obligations to ensure reliable electricity to its consumer members. The upgrading alternative proposes increasing capacity at two existing substations, which would require sixteen (16) miles of upgrades to existing distribution line. The proposed Project would involve the construction of a new 115/25kV substation to provide additional capacity, which would require only six (6) miles of distribution line upgrades. The proposed Project was selected as the preferred electrical alternative; though both the upgrading and construction alternatives meet the project purpose and need, the proposed Project adds capacity at the load center, provides greater operational flexibility, allows for potential future load growth, and is less expensive.

Site Alternatives

GTC defined the study area for site alternatives as a square mile surrounding the load center, within which three (3) sites on undeveloped lands with minimal impacts to private property and the natural and built environment were identified. GTC considered electrical, construction and community suitability, environmental regulatory issues (potential permitting requirements), land acquisition requirements and project costs. Though all of the sites assessed were found to be constructible, Site B, a 5.8 acre site located south of the load center, was selected as the preferred alternative. Site B would be the least visible to the community, have the fewest regulated environmental constraints (no wetlands, streams, or floodplains are located on the site, unlike sites A and C), and would have the lowest total cost among the alternatives.

E. SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The proposed Project will require the disturbance of approximately 6.4-acres of land; the construction of the substation will require 3.6-acres of disturbance, and the activities within the Ola-Ingram 115 kV Transmission Line easement will require 2.8-acres of disturbance. The proposed Project will not be sited within any formally classified lands (lands administered by federal, state, or local agencies) or floodplains. A biological field survey of the project area was conducted in September 2011; no wetlands or federal or state listed threatened or endangered species were identified. A historic structures survey was conducted in June 2011 of the entire study area to facilitate the site selection. An archeological survey was conducted in September 2011 of the proposed Project area (site B), which included both a literature review and field survey (40 shovel tests). No archeological sites and no historic structures listed on or eligible

for listing on the National Register of Historic Places were identified within the respective areas of potential effects; therefore, RUS has made a determination of a finding of no historic properties affected.

F. PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The availability of the EA for public review was announced in the *Jackson Progress-Argus* on July 11th and July 18th, 2012. The EA was made publicly available electronically on the RUS Website, <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/UWP-EA-KeysFerry.html>, and in hard copy at the GTC headquarters office, Jackson-Butts County Library, the McDonough Public Library, and the RUS headquarters office in Washington, DC. The thirty-day public comment period concluded on August 10, 2012, during which time no public or agency comments were received.

G. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the EA, RUS has concluded that the proposed Project would have no significant impacts to existing land use. The proposed Project will not adversely affect historic properties and archeological resources eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. RUS has also concluded that the proposed Project is not likely to affect federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat. Minority and low-income populations will also not be adversely or disproportionately affected by this proposed Project.

No other potential significant impacts resulting from the proposed Project have been identified. Therefore, RUS has determined that this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) fulfills its obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.), the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR §§ 1500-1508), and RUS' Environmental Policies and Procedures, as amended (7 CFR Part 1794) for its action related to the proposed Project.

RUS is satisfied that the environmental impacts of the proposed Project have been adequately evaluated. Since RUS's Federal action will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, the preparation of an environmental impact statement will not be required.

H. RUS LOAN REVIEW AND RIGHT OF ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

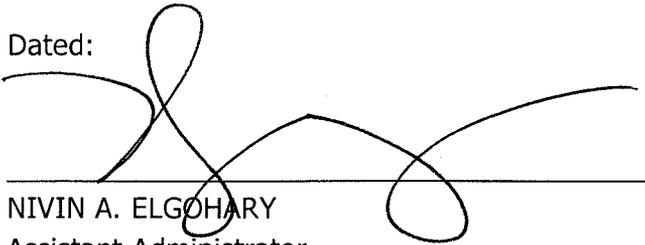
This FONSI is not a decision on GTC's expected loan application and therefore not an approval of the expenditure of federal funds. Issuance of the FONSI and its notices concludes RUS' environmental review process in accordance with NEPA and RUS' Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1794); however, engineering and financial analysis must also be

concluded prior to the approval of the loan. Issuance of the FONSI and publication of notices will allow for these reviews to proceed. There are no provisions to appeal this decision; legal challenges to the FONSI may be filed in federal district court under the Administrative Procedures Act.

I. APPROVAL

This Finding of No Significant Impact is effective on signature.

Dated:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke, positioned above a solid horizontal line.

NIVIN A. ELGOHARY
Assistant Administrator
Electric Programs
Rural Utilities Service

Contact Information

For additional information on this FONSI and EA, please contact Ms. Emily Orler, Environmental Protection Specialist, at USDA, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Stop 1571, Washington DC 20250-1571, (202) 720-1414, or emily.orler@wdc.usda.gov.