



**U.S. Department of Agriculture
Rural Development – Utilities Programs
Rural Utilities Service**

**McClellanville 115kV Transmission Line Proposal
December 2005 – January 2006 Scoping Period
Summary Report/Environmental Decision**

October 2007

**Prepared by:
USDA Rural Development – Utilities Programs
Mangi Environmental Group, Inc.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction.....	3
2.0 Scoping Notification.....	4
2.1 Notice of Intent.....	4
2.2 Letter to Landowners.....	4
2.3 Letter to Interested Parties.....	4
2.4 Public Service Announcement.....	4
2.5 Press Release.....	5
2.6 Availability of Alternative Evaluation and Macrocorridor Study Reports.....	5
3.0 Scoping Meetings.....	6
3.1 Agency Scoping Meeting.....	6
3.2 Public Scoping Open House.....	7
3.2.1 Meeting Details.....	7
4.0 Agency Scoping Comments.....	8
4.1 Agency Scoping Meeting comments.....	8
4.2 Agency Scoping Letters.....	9
4.3 Agency Conference Call.....	11
5.0 Public Scoping Comments.....	12
5.1 Public Comments Received.....	12
5.2 Public Comment Summary.....	12
5.2.1 Aesthetics.....	13
5.2.2 Alternative Actions.....	13
5.2.3 Construction.....	13
5.2.4 Cultural Resources.....	13
5.2.5 Data, Maps, & Reports.....	13
5.2.6 Economics.....	14
5.2.7 NEPA/EA Process.....	14
5.2.8 Environmental Justice.....	14
5.2.9 Growth.....	14
5.2.10 Habitat.....	14
5.2.11 Health & Safety.....	15
5.2.12 Meeting Setup.....	15
5.2.13 Purpose & Need.....	15
5.2.14 Recreation.....	15
5.2.15 Route Selection.....	15
5.2.13 Technology.....	16
5.2.14 Water Resources.....	16
5.2.15 Wildlife.....	16
5.2.16 Other.....	16
6.0 Landowner Follow-Up.....	17
7.0 RUS Environmental Decision(s).....	18

1.0 Introduction

The Rural Utilities Service, an agency which administers the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development – Utilities Programs (USDA Rural Development), has issued a notice with intent to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) related to possible financial assistance to Central Electric Power Cooperative Inc. (CEPCI) for the proposed construction of a new electric transmission line in Berkeley, Charleston, and/or Georgetown Counties, SC.

CEPCI proposes to construct a new 115 kV electric transmission line within one of several corridors that originate from the following source points: Jamestown (Berkeley County); Charity (Berkeley County); and Winyah (Georgetown County). In addition, CEPCI is also considering the construction of a potential new switching station that would be built near Honey Hill (Berkeley County) or a new switch that would be installed in the Belle Isle area (Georgetown County). The macro-corridors for each of these options would terminate at the proposed McClellanville substation.

Design details of the proposed transmission line would include the use of single pole structures ranging in height from 70 to 150 feet. The line would be approximately 20 miles long and would require a right-of-way of approximately 75 feet in width.

For detailed information relating to the purpose and need for the proposal, as well as alternatives to the proposal, please refer to the Macro-corridor Study (November 2005) and the Alternative Evaluation Study (June 2005) available for public review on the USDA Rural Development website at: <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>.

This summary report describes the scoping activities conducted to date by USDA Rural Development for the proposal and decisions that have been made concerning the environmental review of this proposal. All activities have been conducted in accordance with 7 CFR 1794, USDA Rural Development – Utilities Program's procedures for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

2.0 Scoping Notification

2.1 Notice of Intent

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to hold a public scoping meeting and prepare an environmental assessment (EA) was published in the Federal Register on Tuesday, November 29, 2005 (Volume 70, Number 228: 71462). [See Appendix A]

2.2 Letter to Landowners

By letter dated November 28, 2005, approximately 1,500 landowners with property wholly or partially contained within one of the alternative corridors were notified by mail. Property owners were identified from tax parcel map information. The letter announced the NOI to hold a public scoping meeting and to prepare an EA. The letter provided a brief description of the proposal, the NEPA process, meeting information, details about where to direct questions or submit comments, and details about where to find additional information.

2.3 Letter to Interested Parties

A letter providing the same information as the letter to landowners was addressed to interested parties, including 45 agencies, organizations, and individuals [see Appendix B].

2.4 Public Service Announcement

The public service announcement was sent to the following radio stations on November 29, 2005 [see Appendix C]:

Georgetown Radio

WGTN (AM)

WGTN (FM)

Charleston Radio

WKCL (FM)

WTMA (AM)

WCOO (FM)

WXTC (AM)

WNKT (FM)

WWWZ (FM)

WSCI (FM)

WSSX (FM)

WLTQ (AM)

WSVY (FM)

WSCC (FM)

WMGL (FM)

WALC (FM)

WCSQ (FM)

WXLY (FM)

WAVF (FM)

WRFQ (FM)

WXST (FM)

2.5 Press Release

A press release was sent to the Charleston Post and Courier Georgetown Times newspapers on November 29, 2005 (Appendix D). The announcement was posted in the *Georgetown Times* on November 30 and in the Metro Section of the *Charleston Post & Courier* (page B6) on December 1. A public notice was posted in the Legal Section of the *Charleston Post & Courier* on December 2, 2005.

2.6 Availability of Alternative Evaluation and Macro-corridor Study Reports

The Electric Alternative Evaluation and Macro-corridor Study Reports, prepared by CEPCI and Mangi Environmental Group, Inc. (Mangi), were presented at the public scoping meeting and made available for review by agencies and the public. Copies of both reports were distributed at the meeting and by request of the USDA Rural Development. Copies were made available at five public libraries listed below in the McClellanville area and on the USDA Rural Development website at: <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>.

Berkeley County Library
P.O. Box 1239, 1003 Hwy 52
Moncks Corner, SC 29461

Charleston County Library
68 Calhoun Street
Charleston, SC 29401

Georgetown County Library
405 Cleland Street
Georgetown, SC 29440

McClellanville Branch Library
222 Baker Street
McClellanville, SC 29458

Mt. Pleasant Regional Library
1133 Mathis Ferry Road
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464

3.0 Scoping Meetings

3.1 Agency Scoping Meeting

An agency meeting was held on December 14, 2005 at 10:00 AM at the McClellanville Government Services Building located at 405 Pickney Street, McClellanville, SC.

The meeting was facilitated by Stephanie Strength of USDA Rural Development and attended by representatives of the following agencies/organizations:

- US Army Corps of Engineers
- CEPCI
- South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
- USDA Rural Development
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Francis Marion National Forest
- Sumter National Forest
- Mangi Environmental

The meeting provided an opportunity for state and federal agencies to receive a brief and to ask questions and comment on the proposal.

3.2 Public Scoping Meeting

An open-house style, public scoping meeting was held on December 14, 2005, from 4:00 until 8:00 PM at the McClellanville Government Services Building located at: 405 Pickney Street, McClellanville, SC.

3.2.1 Meeting Details

The purpose of the meeting was to provide proposal information to the public and to solicit comments that would be used in developing the scope of the proposal's EA. Prior to the meeting, numerous property owners contacted Rural Development, in response to the scoping letter, to determine the location of their property in relation to the proposed macro-corridors.

Between 150-200 people, mostly local residents, attended the public meeting. Two handouts were distributed to attendees. A project description handout [Appendix E] summarized the proposal, showed a map of the study area and alternative macro-corridors, and provided information on submitting comments. A comment sheet [Appendix F] was also distributed. The comment sheet consisted of a 3-fold self-mailer with a brief description of the proposal and space to comment.

Mangi had two table displays [Appendix G], which described features of the study area that would be considered in the EA. Mangi also displayed wall maps of the Charity, Jamestown, and Belle Isle macro-corridors and manned a laptop computer station, showing landowners where their property was located with respect to alternative macro-corridors. CEPCI had a display table [Appendix H] that provided information about its company and the rationale for the proposal.

4.0 Agency Scoping Comments

This section presents a summary of the substantive comments made by the agencies at the agency scoping meeting, in agency comment letters, and during a conference call.

4.1 Agency Scoping Meeting Comments

The following is a summary of the topics discussed at the December 14, 2005, agency scoping meeting:

Corridor Alternatives

- Add an evaluation of a corridor along Highway 17 existing right of way.
- Provide the cost of crossing a line from one side of the highway to another to avoid endangered species habitat and existing structures

Sensitive Species Data

- RCW and Bald Eagle site data has changed since the study was completed
- Discuss implications of new foraging guidelines for the RCW
- Discuss the use of additional sensitive plant data

Navigable Waters

- Discuss permit required to construct lines across navigable waters.
- Discuss how right of way construction and maintenance methods determine wetland impacts

Migratory Bird Impacts

- Discuss the proposal's impact on migratory birds in wetland areas and across the Santee Delta
- A conference call is scheduled to discuss migratory bird concerns

4.2 Agency Scoping Letters

USDA Rural Development received seven agency letters during the scoping process. The 30-day comment period for agency comment letters ended on January 16, 2006. Submitted letters addressed the following topics:

4.2.1 Francis Marion National Forest

A letter from the Francis Marion National Forest was received on August 12, 2005 (see Attachment L). Topics discussed include:

- Request inclusion of FMNF proclamation boundaries since this data encompasses land that may be acquired in future
- Include Cape Romain Wilderness to overall acreage, totaling to 41,812 acres
- Un-exclude Santee Delta WMA from analysis
- Recommend Forest Service Management Area (MA) 29 receive risk rating of -50 or be excluded from analysis
- Recommend exclusion of red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) sites from analysis; assign half-mile foraging circles risk rating of +50 and excluding cluster sites
- Recommend exclusion of bald eagle primary management zones extending 1500 feet from nest trees
- Recommend exclusion of known flatwoods salamander breeding ponds and quarter-mile buffer
- Concerns about impacts to migratory waterfowl; recommend a risk rating of +25 for Santee Delta
- Assign Unique Natural Areas risk rating of +30 or higher
- Modify risk rating for existing rights-of-way (ROW) from -50 to -25

A letter from the Francis Marion National Forest was received on November 25, 2005 (see Attachment M). Topics discussed include:

- Highlighted several technical corrections needed
- Missing information about threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants
- Recommend assigning cultural sites a ranking of +50
- Concerns about impacting wetlands; assign all wetland habitats ranking of +50 and justify all proposed wetland impacts
- Francis Marion National Forest should receive rating of +50 (same as Santee-Delta)
- Remove Migratory Bird Area and Vista designations

4.2.2 South Carolina Archives & History Center

A letter from the South Carolina Archives & History Center, State Historic Preservation Office was received on July 26, 2001 (see Attachment N). Topics discussed include:

- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 process tribal consultation
- Questionnaires sent to 26 federally and non-federally recognized South Carolina Indian tribes and organizations asking about interest in participating in NHPA review process
- Included list of Indian tribes and organizations with interests in South Carolina

5.0 Public Scoping Comments

5.1 Public Comments Received

This section summarizes the comments made by the public during the public open house scoping meeting and in various telephone, e-mail, and letter submissions. A total of 89 responses and 236 comments were collected.

Number of phone calls:	15
Number of emails:	35
Number of letters (mailed & emailed):	25
Number of forms from open house:	14
Total submitted:	89

5.2 Public Comment Summary

Public Comments were organized into 19 categories and summarized in Table 4-1. Following are the essential portions of the public comments assembled in the categories:

Public Comment Summary	
<u>Category</u>	<u>Number of Comments</u>
Aesthetics	14
Alternative Actions	8
Construction	14
Cultural Resources	8
Data, Maps, & Reports	33
Economics	22
NEPA/EA Process	26
Environmental Justice	1
Growth	4
Habitat	10
Health & Safety	8
Meeting Setup	7
Purpose & Need	5
Recreation	4
Route Selection	35
Technology	3
Water Resources	1
Wildlife	20
Other	13
Total Comments	236

5.2.1 Aesthetics

- Ambiance of community harmed by power lines
- Visual demarcation on private property
- Power line visually detracts from pristine natural environment

5.2.2 Alternative Actions

- Request that RUS take “No Action” alternative
- Consider selecting alternative action with least impact on humans and wildlife
- CEPCI purchase power from South Carolina Electric & Gas since substation and line already in place at Honey Hill
- CEPCI purchase power from South Carolina Electric & Gas and construct lines from Mt. Pleasant along Hwy 17
- No new lines; Berkeley Coop upgrade distribution system and improve maintenance in area

5.2.3 Construction

- Construction impacts wildlife
- Property is 100’ wide and ROW is 70’; will all property be taken?
- Perform construction with least ground disturbance possible
- Existing cellular tower might impact transmission line construction

5.2.4 Cultural Resources

- Transmission line diminishes “rural character” of area
- Object to project due to historical value of property
- Much of area property handed down through several generations
- Property used as children’s camp

5.2.5 Data, Maps, & Reports

- Should have received a copy of both reports
- Data and maps at public meeting not self-explanatory
- Experienced difficulty downloading documents from RUS website
- Residential maps understated number of existing homes in area
- Update study to include new developments, populated areas, and conservation easements
- No photos of residents included in environmental photo displays
- GIS maps insufficiently detailed and poorly explained
- Confusion on actual proposed corridor locations
- Project cost information modified when presented to public
- Ensure accuracy of land values used in data
- Siting Analysis evaluation method unclear (i.e. assignment of Impact Ratings)
- Include underlying algorithms and criteria used to process data and create maps
- Utilize plant ecologist familiar with local flora for field surveys
- Macro-Corridor study too broad for meaningful comments
- Request for 3-D images of all proposed corridors
- Request for specific parcel information

- Request onsite field surveys with local botany experts

5.2.6 Economics

- Property values decreased by new line
- Property values estimated by CEPCI inaccurate
- Project contributes more to developers than local citizens
- Construction impedes plans to develop on property
- Resident receives power from another supplier already
- Could CEPCI purchase property and resurvey?
- Request for financial assistance for use of land
- How would landowners be compensated? Who determines the amount?
- How is my property value determined?
- What are benefits of having a line on your property?
- Underground lines have higher initial expense but more cost-effective with decreased storm risk
- Cost of corridors does not include cost of substations
- More cost-effective to widen existing ROW
- Why is so much money being spent per consumer?
- Factor environmental costs into economic cost analysis

5.2.7 NEPA/EA Process

- Include all data in final EA for public examination
- When will a final decision be made on a preferred corridor and route?
- Request for information (i.e. newsletter) regarding project and current status
- Request for information regarding new public input opportunities
- Concern that residents were not notified of public scoping meeting or affected property

5.2.8 Environmental Justice

- Retiring and low-income residents less able to rebuild/move if necessary

5.2.9 Growth

- Growth most likely to occur in southern 20% of project area
- Growth in McClellanville-Awendaw area is slow and constrained by conservation easements

5.2.10 Habitat

- Concern over environmental impacts and fragmentation in National Forest
- Site contains one of few longleaf ecosystems remaining on Atlantic Coastal Plain
- Minimize habitat disturbance: bury cable, remove soil in squares, protect vegetation and natural processes, reduce mechanical and chemical disturbance
- All routes traverse fire-dependent ecosystems and exacerbate problem of prescribed fires
- Study understates value of Pine uplands in FMNF

5.2.11 Health & Safety

- What impacts do power lines have on people?
- Concern over public access to property due to new ROW
- Danger from proximity of hunting in ROW
- Request for more information on EMF impact and health issues
- What is the buffer distance between houses and transmission lines?
- Concern that health and safety of families rated equally with wildlife

5.2.12 Meeting Setup

- Too few representatives present to answer public questions
- Request for extra meetings and formal presentations
- Residents pleased with CD option
- Meeting setup confusing; difficult to comprehend facts

5.2.13 Purpose & Need

- Need is unclear since no water or sewer infrastructure is present
- Need is unclear since growth around McClellanville is slow
- Occasional power outages considered an acceptable “rural” occurrence
- Frequent power outages experienced; transmission line is needed

5.2.14 Recreation

- Near Wambaw Hunting Unit ROW creates open firing lane, puts hunters within range of landowners
- Hunting in ROW presents danger to residents

5.2.15 Corridor/Route Selection

- Why do corridors deviate from the existing [Charity to Winyah 230 kV] transmission line?
- Why do corridors deviate from Highway 17?
- Suggest widening existing ROW instead of new clearing
- Prefer line placement on Forest Service land over private land
- Prefer Bell-Isle Routes; more cost-effective and impacts least Forest Service land
- Prefer Honey Hill substation; minimizes length of line reducing storm damage risk and maintenance needs, avoids historical sites at Jamestown
- Prefer Jamestown to McClellanville #5.5 Route
- Object to Charity Routes
- Object to Bell-Isle to McClellanville Routes
- Object to Hwy 17
- Suggested alternative corridors:
 - Head east across Hwy 45 north of McClellanville, then turn southeast towards McClellanville substation
 - Follow Hwy 17
 - From intersection of Halfway Creek Road and 201 B Round Pond towards Moores Corner; utilizes existing 230 kV line, impacted landowners would receive power

- Line follow Steed Creek Road to Hwy 17 at Bell Creek; plan substation on future Berkeley Electric Cooperative office complex
- From Honey Hill substation travel east down Hwy 45, turn off on Palmer Bridge Road, left on Randall Road and traverse to McClellanville
- Utilize existing Santee Cooper to Nucor Steel route passing through Honey Hill; build Honey Hill substation, downgrade voltage and connect to McClellanville
- Prefer non-residential routes
- Prefer avoidance of Forest Service lands
- Will transmission line pass through neighborhoods?
- Would my house be taken if it is located in a macro-corridor?
- Can center line be adjusted to decrease visibility?
- Consider placing substation in Awendaw?
- Power lines should be set back off highways
- Concern over encroachment on private property

5.2.13 Technology

- Run underground transmission lines along Hwy 17 from Georgetown
- Co-locate transmission lines on existing distribution structures
- How big are the towers?

5.2.14 Water Resources

- Select corridors that minimize disruption to wetlands

5.2.15 Wildlife

- Diverse wildlife and plant species exist on affected properties
- Routes impact rare and engendered flora and fauna
- Overhead crossings threaten migratory birds
- Study did not incorporate available data on wildlife
- *Ambystoma cingulatum* habitat crossed by Charity corridor
- Bald Eagle given greater protection than Red-cockaded Woodpecker
- Request for further discussion about migratory bird impact
- GIS modeling and risk analysis exclude rare and endangered plants
- All alternative routes potentially harm threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species (Pondberry, Chaffseed, Spiked Medusa Orchid, Grass-of-Parnassus)
- Control corridor vegetation with natural processes such as fire, not chemical/mechanical means

5.2.16 Other

- Certain corridors subject to potential hurricane damage

6.0 Landowner Follow-Up

This section compiles the information that was provided to landowners about where their property is located with respect to any of the alternative corridors in response to submitted requests and requests made at the public open house meeting.

Landowners given parcel information:

Maps were mailed prior to the Open House:	18
Viewed GIS maps during the Open House:	28
Maps were mailed after the Open House:	11
TOTAL:	57

Requests for copies of Alternatives Analysis and Macrocorridor Study:

Requests from Open House:	36 + 2
Requests during comment period:	4 (at least)
TOTAL:	42

Master mailing list:

TOTAL:	1630 people
---------------	-------------

7.0 RUS Environmental Decision(s)

Following the completion of a formal scoping period, USDA Rural Development is required to:

- (1) review and consider the scope of comments and information provided by the public and agencies and
- (2) identify important issues and impact analyses that must be evaluated in an EA or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

If it appears that a proposal may have a significant effect to the human environment, USDA Rural Development can decide at any point to proceed with the preparation of an EIS (§1794.50).

Comments provided during the scoping period revealed that information used as the basis for the siting model was not up-to-date. Information was missing on residential development, known locations of federal- and state-protected species, wildlife management linkage areas, conservation easements, etc. Evaluation of this information revealed that the selection of one or more macro-corridor alternatives could have a significant effect to the human environment. Therefore, USDA Rural Development has decided to prepare an EIS for this proposal and not an EA.

Consideration of new alternatives

Following scoping, additional information was provided about the location of public and private conservation easements, RCW colonies, residential subdivisions, sensitive youth camping areas, etc. This information will be integrated into the transmission line siting model and used during selection of a preferred corridor.

After re-running the siting model, a new macro-corridor alternative, Britton Neck/Winyah, emerged. This alternative involves siting a line through private forestlands from a new switching station (Britton Neck 1 or 2). Its macro-corridor would include crossing the North and South Santee Rivers and being sited in areas east of the Hampton Plantation State Park.

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A USDA Rural Development Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental assessment (Federal Register, 70 [228]: 71462)
- Appendix B Scoping letter to interested parties
- Appendix C Text of public service announcement
- Appendix D Newspaper press releases
- Appendix E Project description handout
- Appendix F Public comment form
- Appendix G Public meeting exhibit: information about topics to be considered in environmental assessment & macro-corridor maps
- Appendix H Public meeting exhibit: CEPCI company information and rationale for proposal