

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Cardinal-Hickory Creek 345-kV Transmission Line Project

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of availability of an environmental assessment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, is issuing an environmental assessment (EA) for public review and comment in connection with possible to determine the significance of the impacts related to eight proposed route modifications to the selected route discussed in the Record of Decision for the Cardinal-Hickory Creek 345-kV Transmission Line Project Environmental Impact State.

DATES: Written comments on the EA will be accepted until July 24, 2021. All comments should be emailed to CardinaltoHickoryCreekEIS@usda.gov by July 24, 2021, in order to be considered. Due to COVID-19, no hard copy comments will be accepted. All comments must be provided electronically.

ADDRESSES: A copy of the EA may be viewed online at the following Web site:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/impact-statements/cardinal-%E2%80%93-hickory-creek-transmission-line>. A hard copy of the EA is available for review at Dairyland Power Cooperative, 3521 East Avenue, South, La Crosse, WI 54602 and 6 local libraries in the project area which are listed below.

- Dodgeville Public Library, 139 S. Iowa St., Dodgeville, WI
- Dubuque County Library, Asbury Branch, 5290 Grand Meadow Drive, Asbury, IA
- Eckstein Memorial Library, 1034 E. Dewey St., Cassville, WI
- Guttenberg Public Library, 603 S. 2nd St., Guttenberg, IA
- Middleton Public Library, 7425 Hubbard Ave, Middleton, WI
- Schreiner Memorial Library, 113 W. Elm St., Lancaster, WI

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: For further information, contact: Kristen Bastis, Environmental Protection Specialist, USDA, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Room 2244, Stop 1571, Washington, DC 20250-1571, or email CardinaltoHickoryCreekEIS@usda.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has prepared an EA to meet its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 7 CFR 1970 related to providing financial assistance to Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) for its share in the construction of a proposed 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission line and associated infrastructure connecting the Hickory Creek Substation in Dubuque County, Iowa, with the Cardinal Substation in the Town of Middleton, Wisconsin (near Madison, Wisconsin). Between September and December 2020, Dairyland Power Cooperative (Dairyland) and other project participants submitted a series of eight proposed route modifications for the approved C-HC Project. Six of the eight proposed route modifications are a result of final design of the C-HC Project and landowner negotiations for crossing private land in Wisconsin. One proposed route modification is at the Turkey River substation in Iowa to accommodate the termination of Dairyland's N-9 Transmission Line at the substation.

The final proposed route modification, B-IA3, is a result of ongoing consultation under the Programmatic Agreement (PA) that is being implemented for National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 compliance for the C-HC Project. On March 1, 2021, the applicants submitted a request of the USFWS for an amended right of way through the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

The EA describes the project, assesses the project's environmental impacts, and summarizes mitigation measures used to minimize the environmental effects. Additionally, the EA tiers to the Final Environmental Impact Statement that was published for the approved C-HC Project in October 2019. Its purpose is to evaluate the significance to determine whether a supplemental EIS should be prepared. On January 16, 2020, the RUS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) completed the NEPA process for various components of the C-HC Project and the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed by the three agencies. The ROD was the conclusion of the NEPA process for the C-HC Project route between the Cardinal substation in Dane County, Wisconsin, and the Hickory Creek substation in Dubuque County, Iowa, including the new Hill Valley substation near Montfort, Wisconsin, and several substation improvements. RUS, the lead Federal agency, approved the C-HC Project to proceed to the RUS loan review and engineering review processes. In August 2020, the USFWS approved the Utilities' request for a right-of-way (ROW) easement, and in November 2020, issued a Special Use Permit to cross the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge). In September 2020, the USACE approved the easement for crossing USACE-managed lands in the Refuge and issued permits required by Section 10 and Section 408 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

The purpose of the proposed project is to: 1) address reliability issues on the regional bulk transmission system, 2) alleviate congestion that occurs in certain parts of the transmission system and remove constraints that limit the delivery of power, 3) expand the access of the transmission system to additional resources, 4) increase the transfer capability of the electrical system between Iowa and Wisconsin, 5) reduce the losses in transferring power and increase the efficiency of the transmission system, and 6) respond to public policy objectives aimed at enhancing the nation's transmission system and to support the changing generation mix.

RUS is the lead agency for the federal environmental review with USFWS, USACE, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) serving as cooperating agencies.

Any final action by RUS related to the proposed project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal environmental laws and regulations and completion of environmental review procedures as prescribed by 7 CFR Part 1970, Environmental Policies and Procedures.

A general location map of the proposal is shown below.

June 24, 2021

CARDINAL-HICKORY CREEK 345-KV TRANSMISSION LINE EIS

TRANSMISSION LINE CORRIDORS PROPOSED ROUTE MODIFICATIONS MAY 2021

CLAYTON AND DUBUQUE CO, IOWA
GRANT, LAFAYETTE, IOWA, AND DANE CO, WISCONSIN

