

## **Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Mount Savage Communications Facility, Maryland**

### **Introduction**

The State of Maryland proposes to construct a communications facility with a 348-foot three-legged self-supporting lattice tower. The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the State of Maryland, Mount Savage Communications Facility, Allegany County (dated July 2010), provides an analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with the use of grant funds issued by the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program, administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This EA covers the proposed Mount Savage communications facility, which would be part of a Statewide 700 MHz communications system linking several State agency users (e.g., Maryland State Police, Maryland Department of Transportation, Maryland Transportation Authority, and Maryland Department of Natural Resources [DNR]), as well as multiple smaller Maryland resource agencies (e.g., Department of the Environment, Department of Juvenile Services, and Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services) to fill in local coverage gaps and ensure Public Safety Intranet (PSINET) connectivity in areas previously lacking adequate emergency coverage.

### **Scope of the Environmental Assessment (EA)**

The proposed Mount Savage communications facility would apply funds issued by the PSIC Grant Program. The PSIC Grant Program was developed to assist State, local, tribal, and non-governmental agencies in developing interoperable communications as they leverage the newly available spectrum in the 700 MHz band. As a condition of the PSIC Grant Program, grantees must comply with all relevant Federal legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

The NTIA has specified that PSIC funds must be used for projects that would improve communications in areas at high risk for natural disasters, in urban and metropolitan areas at high risk for terrorism threats, and should include pre-positioning or securing of interoperable communications for immediate deployment during emergencies or major disasters. Investments receiving PSIC funds can range from installation of new large-scale infrastructure (i.e., communications towers) to the acquisition of mobile and portable radios. Under the categories outlined in the PSIC Grant Program's Programmatic EA (February 2009) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (April 2009), the proposed Mount Savage Communications Facility is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Mount Savage communications facility would allow for the following:

- Increased coverage area for emergency responders connected through the system,
- Facilitate reliable interoperable communications among first responder organizations,
- Expansion of the 700 MHz communications system throughout the State, and
- Enhanced simulcast coverage throughout the area.

This EA examines the Proposed Action to develop a new communications facility in western Maryland (Mount Savage, Allegany County). The proposed Mount Savage communications

facility would include the construction of a 348-foot self-supporting three-legged lattice telecommunications tower to be placed within a 100-foot by 100-ft (10,000 square-foot [sq-ft]) fenced equipment compound, and includes two 12-foot by 38-foot equipment shelters supported by a backup generator and an associated liquid propane fuel tank. The proposed site would be located within 74.82-acres of privately-owned property on a former strip mine that has been filled and graded for future residential use. The property has been donated to Allegany County for use as a tower site by private landowners, Mr. and Mrs. Bohn, under a Memorandum of Understanding. The Mount Savage proposed site is located at the 1400 block of Bald Knob Road, approximately 1,900 feet southeast of the intersection of Bald Knob Road and Blank Road in Mount Savage, Allegany County, Maryland. About 35 acres of the property are cleared and graded. The area surrounding the subject property is mountainous terrain with residential areas, undeveloped wooded land, and small farms. The proposed location is currently graded, grassy land near the edge of the cleared field at the top of Bald Knob. No tree removal is anticipated. Total ground disturbance would be approximately 14,000 sq-ft, or 0.32 acres. The proposed communications facility would tie into the existing utilities system along Bald Knob Road. Utility connections would be made by direct burial cable extending from Bald Knob Road to the communications facility along a 1,500-foot trenched line. Electrical power requirements for the proposed facility would be a maximum of 400 amps and would be supplied by the local utility service, Allegheny Power. Upgrades to an existing grass access road (12-foot x 1,500-foot) would be included to improve access to the site originating from Bald Knob Road.

This EA analyses existing conditions and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action with four major resource areas: natural and physical environment, social environment, cultural environment, and infrastructure and waste management. Natural and physical resource areas analyzed in detail included air quality, noise, threatened and endangered species with migratory birds, vegetation and wildlife, and human health and safety. Analysis of the social environment included community facilities and services, land use planning and zoning, economy and employment, taxes and revenue, and aesthetics and visual resources. The cultural environment included analysis of the Area of Potential Effects (APE), archeological resources, and historic resources. Infrastructure and waste management included the analysis of transportation, telecommunications, electrical power and gas, and waste management.

### **Alternatives Considered**

**Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative).** Under the No Action Alternative, the State of Maryland would not utilize the Mount Savage site for the proposed communications facility. The existing Mount Savage property would remain as it presently exists, privately-owned land on a former reclaimed strip mine. The Proposed Action would not move forward with PSIC funds or any alternate funding sources. The No Action Alternative served as the baseline for assessing the impacts of the alternatives.

**Alternative 2 (PSIC-Funded Communications Facility).** Alternative 2 is to implement the proposed Mount Savage communications facility in its entirety, consisting of a 348-foot self-supporting three-legged lattice tower, two 12-foot x 38-foot equipment shelters, a backup generator, and an associated liquid propane fuel tank within a 10,000 sq-ft fenced compound. The proposed facility would tie into the existing utilities located along Bald Knob Road. Utility connections would be made by direct burial cable extending from Bald Knob Road to the

proposed site along a 1,500-foot trenched line. Electrical power requirements for the facility would be a maximum of 400 amps and would be supplied by the local utility service, Allegheny Power. Upgrades to an existing grass access road (12-foot x 1,500-foot) would extend off the property. Alternative 2 is located on an approximately 74.82-acre privately-owned property located on a former strip mine that has been filled and graded for future residential use. The land has been donated by the private landowner, Mr. and Mrs. Bohn, under a Memorandum of Understanding with Allegheny County.

### **Recommended Alternative**

Alternative sites were initially screened through a review of area planning documents, property tax maps, and aerial photographs. Screening included identification of feasible sites for the proposed communications facility, potential site availability, potential impacts involved at each site, and potential concerns of interested parties. Initially, a site location on the Mount Savage Middle School property was selected for study. After consultation with the Mount Savage School District and local residents, this site was eliminated from consideration due to concerns about its proximity to a public school. Alternative 2 was selected for further study based on the initial screening efforts and because the proposed site was located in an open field on a reclaimed strip mine. In addition, an online review of Maryland's MERLIN data site indicted no initial environmental concerns.

Alternative 2 to implement the Mount Savage communications facility is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of the State of Maryland to strengthen the overall local and regional communications capabilities by providing adequate connectivity and duplicity of communications over the local, regional, and Statewide area. In addition, Alternative 2 allows the planned extension of the PSINET to link first responders and local agencies to one another, and eliminate coverage gaps throughout the State. This alternative would facilitate greater security, reliable interoperable communications, and significant increased simulcast capability for emergency responders. Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative) would not address the need for the State of Maryland as existing deficiencies would remain, and vital links with first responders and local agencies would not be provided thereby posing a greater risk to public safety in the event of an emergency or natural disaster.

### **Consultations**

Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet the Section 7 requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was accomplished through correspondence with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The USFWS indicated in a letter dated September 30, 2009 that, except for occasional transient individuals, no Federally-listed threatened or endangered species occur within the proposed project area; therefore, no further Section 7 coordination would be required. The USFWS also noted concerns regarding the potential impact of the tower on migratory birds and recommended guidelines for lighting and marking to minimize bird strike fatalities. Lighting and marking would be conducted in a manner as to comply with the USFWS recommendations. Coordination was also conducted with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to determine the potential for impacts to State-listed rare, threatened or endangered species. In a letter from the Maryland DNR dated October 19, 2009, it was determined that there were no records of State-listed rare, threatened or endangered species within the boundaries of the proposed project site. However, the Maryland DNR identified

forested area on the site contains Forest Interior Dwelling (FIDS) Bird Species habitat within the vicinity of the proposed Mount Savage communications facility site. FIDS bird species are declining in Maryland and throughout the eastern United States. As a result, the Maryland DNR strongly encouraged conservation of FIDS habitat and provided guidelines to incorporate in the site design to help minimize project impacts to FIDS and other native forest plant and wildlife. The Mount Savage EA identifies that all proposed project activities for this action will take place in un-forested areas and no disturbance, isolation or elimination of forest canopy cover is anticipated.

The proposed project is not likely to result in significant environmental impacts. Coordination with appropriate Federal and State fish and wildlife agencies concluded that there were no potential direct adverse impacts to threatened or endangered species. Potential impacts to migratory birds would be addressed through recommended mitigation regarding lighting and tower marking. In addition, the absence of any tree removal during construction on the proposed site adheres to guidance provided regarding FIDS habitat, including limiting disturbance to non-forested areas, minimizing forest isolation, and maintaining forest canopy closure over roads.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished through an informal consultation with the Maryland State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)/Maryland Historical Trust to determine whether the construction of the proposed communications facility may generate any short- or long-term indirect impacts to historic and cultural resources and may be located within the viewshed of any historic and cultural resources. A file review and a field survey of existing buildings and structures previously inventoried by the Maryland Historical Trust identified no properties that have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) within the Area of Potential Effect (APE), a 0.75 mile radius around the project site. One resource that is eligible for listing on the NRHP was identified as the Mason-Dixon Line: Milestone Number 176 (AI-V-B-298). Since this site is significant for its contributions to the broad patterns of U.S. history (settlement, politics, and boundary survey) and not for its architectural or visual characteristics, it was determined that the significant characteristics of the site would not be impacted by the construction of the proposed tower. The Maryland SHPO/Maryland Historical Trust reviewed and concurred in a letter on October 28, 2009 with the determination that the proposed project would have no effect on historic properties.

### **Findings and Conclusions**

The proposed Mount Savage communications facility is not likely to result in any environmental impacts and does not involve any unusual risks or impacts to sensitive areas. The Proposed Action would require construction of a new transmitting and receiving 348-foot self-supporting three-legged lattice tower with ground disturbance activities totaling 14,000 sq-ft (0.32 acres), and was found to have no significant impacts to any resource impacts examined. Coordination with appropriate Federal and State agencies concluded that there were no potential adverse impacts to threatened or endangered species, or archeological or historic resources. Potential impacts to migratory birds would be addressed through recommended mitigation regarding lighting and tower marking. In addition, no trees would be removed to accommodate this project, which follows Maryland DNR guidance on reducing or eliminating effects to FIDS habitat.

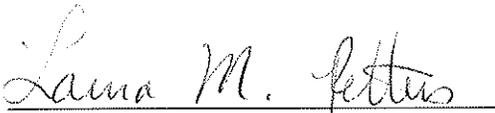
**NTIA Review**

NTIA determined that the July 2010 EA of the proposed Mount Savage Communications Facility adequately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed telecommunication facility development, including a 348-foot self-supporting three-legged lattice tower, shelters, associated equipment, and improved access road, and that the scope, alternatives considered, and content of the EA are adequate.

This FONSI is based on the attached EA which has been independently evaluated by the NTIA. The NTIA determined that the EA adequately and accurately addresses the environmental issues and impacts of the proposed project and provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement is not required.

Based on the best available information and NTIA's independent review, NTIA has decided to adopt the July 2010 EA for the State of Maryland, Mount Savage Communications Facility. This FONSI has therefore been prepared and is being submitted to document environmental review and evaluation in compliance with the NEPA of 1969. The decision documents for the environmental review of the Proposed Action are attached.

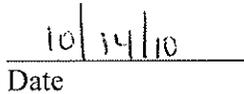
I have considered the information contained in the EA, which is the basis for this FONSI. Based on the information in the EA and this FONSI document, I agree that the Proposed Action as described above, and in the EA, would have no significant impact on the environment.



Laura M. Pettus

Responsible Program Manager

Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration



Date

**ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT**

**Title of document being adopted:** Environmental Assessment for the State of Maryland, Mount Savage Communications Facility

**Proponent:** Maryland Department of Information Technology (MDoIT), Networks Division

**Location of current proposal:** Mount Savage, Allegany County, Maryland

**Agency that prepared document being adopted:** MDoIT, Networks Division

**Date adopted document was prepared:** July 2010

**Description of document (or portion) being adopted:** The July 2010 EA of the State of Maryland, Mount Savage Communications Facility provides an analysis of the Proposed Action to construct a new transmission and receiving site in southern Maryland. The proposed Mount Savage communications facility would consist of a 348-foot self-supporting three-legged lattice telecommunications tower to be placed within a 10,000 square-foot fenced equipment compound, and includes two 12-foot x 38-foot equipment shelters supported by a backup generator and an associated liquid propane fuel tank. Utility connections would be made by direct burial cable along a 1,500-foot trenched line. Electrical power would be supplied by Allegheny Power. In addition, a 12-foot x 1,500-foot improved access road would be upgraded from the current grass roadway to provide access to the site. The tower and site construction and equipment acquisition and installation for this Proposed Action do not have any significant environmental impacts or extraordinary circumstances.

**The Department of Commerce has identified and adopted this document as being appropriate for National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) purposes after independent review. The document meets its environmental review needs for approval under the PSIC Grant Program and will accompany the proposal to the decision maker.**

**Name of agency adopting the document:** NTIA

**Responsible Official:** Laura M. Pettus

**Position/Title:** Responsible Program Manager

**Address:** NTIA, Room 4812, 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20230

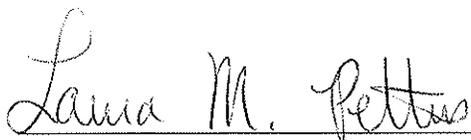
**Please contact:** Laura Pettus **Phone:** (202) 482-4509 **Fax:** (202) 501-8013

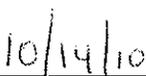
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**DATE OF ISSUE: SIGNATURE:**

Signed:

Date:

  
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