

Finding of No Significant Impact for 450-foot Self-Support Communications Tower Southmont Drive, Asheboro, NC (Randolph County)

Introduction

The North Carolina Highway Patrol – Department of Crime and Public Safety proposes to develop a new communications site by acquiring and installing a 450-foot (ft) self-support tower in Randolph County, North Carolina. The 450-foot Self-Support Communications Tower Southmont Drive, Asheboro, NC (Randolph County) Environmental Assessment (EA), further referenced as the Asheboro North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Emergency Services Communications Tower EA, 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, to build this facility and associated equipment.

Scope of the Environmental Assessment (EA)

The proposed Asheboro NCDOT communications tower 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 megahertz (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 grant funds must be used for projects that would improve communications in areas at high risk for natural disasters and 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 the installation of new large-scale infrastructure (i.e., communications towers) to the acquisition of mobile / portable handheld radios. As outlined in the PSIC Grant Program's Programmatic EA (March 2009) and Final Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (April 2009), the proposed Asheboro NCDOT site is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Asheboro NCDOT communications tower facility would allow for the following:

- Increased radio frequency (RF) coverage area for Federal, State, and local emergency first responders connected through the State Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders (VIPER) network,
- Updated equipment to support new frequencies to improve and expand voice and data coverage,
- Facilitate reliable interoperable communications among first responder organizations, and
- Enhanced security and facility control.

The EA examines the Proposed Action to develop a new communications facility in Asheboro, Randolph County, North Carolina. The proposed project would include the construction of a 450-ft self-support lattice communications tower, an 11.42-ft by 19-ft equipment shelter, and a standalone 40 kilowatt (kW) diesel powered emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft by 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad. All components would be contained within an irregular shaped 24-ft by 53-ft by 64-ft by 30-ft fenced compound. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.056 acres. The proposed site would be situated on an approximately 36.57-acre parent property primarily occupied by an NCDOT operations facility, undeveloped forested and maintained grass lawn land uses reportedly owned by the State of North Carolina Highway and Public Works Commission. The areas surrounding the site consist of light industrial, commercial, and municipal land uses.

A proposed 12-ft wide access drive would proceed south from an existing paved NCDOT fueling station located on the parent property for approximately 50-ft until reaching the proposed fenced tower compound located within a maintained grass lawn.

The EA analyzes existing conditions and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action for 11 resource areas: noise, air quality, geology and soils, water resources, biological resources, historic and cultural resources, aesthetic and visual resources, land use, infrastructure, socioeconomic resources, and human health and safety.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) is to implement the Asheboro NCDOT tower site in its entirety, consisting of a 450-ft self-support lattice communications tower, an 11.42 ft by 19-ft equipment shelter, and a standalone 40 kW diesel powered emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft by 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad contained within an irregular shaped 24-ft by 53-ft by 64-ft by 30-ft fenced compound with associated equipment. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.056 acres. The proposed site would be situated on an approximately 36.57-acre parent property primarily occupied by an NCDOT operations facility, undeveloped forested and maintained grass lawn land uses reportedly owned by the State of North Carolina Highway and Public Works Commission. The areas surrounding the site consist of light industrial, commercial, and municipal land uses.

The proposed Asheboro NCDOT communications facility would meet current RF coverage needs of the North Carolina Highway Patrol in Randolph County and surrounding counties within North Carolina. Due to the elevation of the proposed site, and the topographic features of the surrounding area, the proposed site would provide RF coverage for Randolph County as well as increased interoperability network opportunities for similar sites in the region. The proposed site would provide reliable interoperable communications and a significantly increased coverage area for emergency first responders. The elevation and topography of the proposed site provides a natural height advantage, resulting in enhanced coverage with the proposed 450-ft self-support lattice communications tower. This site is strategically located, expanding the coverage radius for Randolph County as well as portions of the surrounding counties within North Carolina.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the current emergency services radio system coverage would not be met causing serious limitation on emergency response, funding for interoperable communications and information systems infrastructure would not be released, and infrastructure would neither be developed nor enhanced. The No Action Alternative would not address the needs for the North Carolina Highway Patrol. The Proposed Action would not move forward using PSIC grant funds or any alternate funding sources. The No Action Alternative served as the baseline for assessing the impacts of the alternatives in the EA.

Alternatives Considered But Not Carried Forward

One alternative site was examined to determine the range of reasonable alternatives to implement the Proposed Action. The alternative site was located within a 1-acre lot, reportedly owned by the State of North Carolina. The property was partially occupied by an existing U.S. Forest Service (USFS) fire tower located in Asheboro, Randolph County. This alternative site was abandoned as a reasonable alternative due to foreseeable disputes from "local" residents and the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (NC SHPO) in regards to the location of the proposed tower adjacent to an existing USFS fire tower that may be potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Based on these concerns, this proposed alternative was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

Additionally, existing towers in the vicinity of the City of Asheboro were examined to determine the collocation potential for the VIPER System antennas, microwave dishes, and associated equipment. However, analyses of the existing towers determined that there were no viable collocation opportunities within the North Carolina Highway Patrol service area that would satisfy the radio frequency coverage needs of the VIPER Emergency services communications system. Based on these factors, collocating equipment onto existing towers was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) to construct the proposed Asheboro NCDOT communications facility is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Randolph County and the North Carolina Highway Patrol to improve and facilitate reliable interoperable communications, significantly increase the RF coverage area for emergency first responders through the State VIPER network, and provide greater security and facility control. The No Action Alternative would not address the communications needs for Randolph County.

Consultations

Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet the Section 7 requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was accomplished through a preliminary review of protected species from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Division of Endangered Species Web site to identify listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, as well as critical habitats that may be located on or near the proposed site. Based on a review of the USFWS Web site and correspondence with the USFWS Raleigh Field Office, only two endangered species were identified for Randolph County, North Carolina including the Cape Fear shiner (*Notropis mekistocholas*) and Schweinitz's Sunflower (*Helianthus schweinitzii*). Site surveys were conducted at the proposed site; no burrows, nests, wetlands, coastal areas or other signs of threatened and endangered species and/or critical habitat were readily observable. Habitats for these species were compared to the habitat present at the proposed site; the species' habitats were not identified as having a potential to be present on the proposed site. The USFWS Raleigh Field Office concurred with the determination dated on October 27, 2010 that the Proposed Action is not likely to adversely affect any federally listed species.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished with the NC SHPO and the NC Office of State Archeology to determine whether the construction of the proposed site may generate any short- or long-term indirect impacts to historic and cultural resources or may be located within the viewshed of any historic and cultural resources. An archaeological evaluation was conducted to assess the potential direct effects the Proposed Action may have on archaeological resources. The archaeological evaluation was conducted at the NC SHPO office and the NC Office of State Archeology to view the pertinent U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute topographic map (Asheboro) to assess the potential significant impacts to architectural, historic, or archeological sites in the vicinity of the tower site. In addition, an archaeological evaluation was conducted and concluded that no archaeological resources eligible for inclusion in the NRHP would be affected by the Proposed Action.

Letters were submitted to the NC Department of Cultural Resources-Environmental Review Coordinator and NC Department of Cultural Resources: Office of State Archaeology-Project Registrar related to any potential impacts to historical or archaeological resources within a 1.5 mile area of potential effect (APE) of the site. A response letter was received from the on November 19, 2010 concurring with the determination that the Proposed Action would not impact historical or archaeological resources in the area. However, the APE was determined to be a 2.0 mile radius around the Proposed Action tower centerline. Letters were also submitted to the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission, Liberty Historic Preservation Commission, and the City of Asheboro Planning Department on November 22, 2010, inviting them to be a consulting party regarding any potential impact to historical

or archaeological resources in the area. Appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Officers of Federally-recognized Native American Tribes with known ancestral rights to Randolph County were consulted to determine the potential effect from the Proposed Action. Concurrence from all appropriate Native American Tribes was received regarding the Proposed Action. A public notice was issued related to impacts to historic and cultural resources in the *Asheboro Courier Tribune News* on October 13, 2010. No public or agency comments were received. Additional concurrence was received for the 2.0 mile APE from the NC Department of Cultural Resources-Environmental Review Coordinator (NC SHPO) on January 4, 2011 that the Proposed Action would have "no adverse effect" on historic properties.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Asheboro NCDOT 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 450-ft self-support lattice communications tower and associated equipment with ground disturbance activities (totaling 0.056 acres). In accordance with 47 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 1.1307(a) (1) through (8), an evaluation was made to determine whether any of the listed Federal Communications Commission (FCC) special interest items would be significantly affected if a tower structure and associated equipment control cabinets were constructed at the proposed site location. No FCC special interest items were identified.

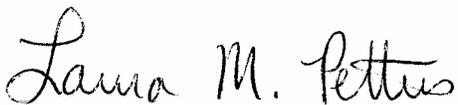
NTIA Review

NTIA determined that the February 2011 Southmont Drive, Asheboro, NC (Randolph County) 450-ft Self-Support Communications Tower EA accurately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed development including a 450-ft self-support lattice communications tower 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 and determined to adequately and accurately discuss 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 February 2011 EA for the Southmont Drive, Asheboro, NC (Randolph County) 450-ft Self-Support Communications Tower. The EA is available for public review at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA_sub3.html. This FONSI has therefore been prepared and is being submitted to document environmental review and evaluation in compliance with NEPA. The decision documents for the environmental review of the Proposed Action are attached.

I have considered the information contained in the EA, and supporting documentation, 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



Date

Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Title of document being adopted: Southmont Drive, Asheboro, NC (Randolph County) 450-ft Self-Support Communications Tower EA

Proponent: North Carolina State Administrative Agency (SAA)

Location of current proposal: Asheboro, Randolph County, North Carolina

Agency that prepared document being adopted: North Carolina Highway Patrol – Department of Crime and Public Safety

Date adopted document was prepared: February 24, 2011

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The proposed Asheboro North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) communications facility would include a 450-foot (ft) self-support lattice communications tower, an 11.42-ft by 19-ft equipment shelter, and a standalone 40 kilowatt (kW) diesel powered emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft by 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad contained within an irregular shaped 24-ft by 53-ft by 64-ft by 30-ft fenced compound with associated equipment. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.056 acres. The proposed site would be situated on an approximately 36.57-acre parent property primarily occupied by an NCDOT operations facility, undeveloped forested and maintained grass lawn land uses reportedly owned by the State of North Carolina Highway and Public Works Commission. The areas surrounding the site consist of light industrial, commercial, and municipal land uses. A proposed 12-ft wide access drive would proceed south from an existing paved NCDOT fueling station located on the parent property for approximately 50-ft until reaching the proposed fenced tower compound located within a maintained grass lawn. The tower and site construction for this Proposed Action does not have any significant environmental impacts or extraordinary circumstances.

The document is available to be read at: http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA_sub3.html

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

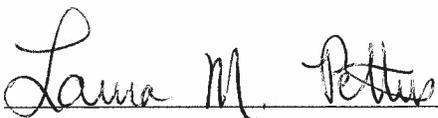
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Signed:

Date:



3/30/11
