

Finding of No Significant Impact for 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower at 853 NC Highway 700, Pelham, NC (Caswell 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 300-foot (ft) self-support tower in Caswell County, North Carolina. The 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower at 853 NC Highway 700, Pelham, NC (Caswell County) Environmental Assessment (EA), further referenced as the Pelham 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 Pelham 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 of 1969 (NEPA).

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 (February 2009) and Final Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (April 2009), the proposed Pelham communications tower site is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Pelham 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 Pelham, Caswell County, North Carolina. The proposed project would include the construction of a 300-ft self-support communications tower with an 11.5 ft x 19 ft equipment shelter and a standalone 40-kilowatt (kW) diesel emergency generator mounted on a 5.5 ft x 9.5 ft concrete foundation pad. All components would be contained within an irregular shaped 40 ft x 21 ft x 37 ft x 8 ft x 29 ft x 29 ft fenced compound. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.058 acres.

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 Pelham communications tower facility in its entirety, consisting of a 300-ft self-support communications tower with a 11.5 ft x 19 ft equipment shelter and a standalone 40-kW diesel emergency generator mounted on a 5.5 ft x 9.5 ft concrete foundation pad. All components would be contained within an irregular shaped 40 ft x 21 ft x 37 ft x 8 ft x 29 ft x 29 ft fenced compound. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.058 acres. The site would be located on an approximately 82.05-acre property, reportedly owned by Caswell County. A proposed 12 ft wide access drive would proceed north-northwest from an existing gravel drive for approximately 48 ft before reaching the proposed fenced tower compound. The site is located within an active agricultural field and undeveloped forested land on the parent property, north of a convenience/ liquor store and northwest of a North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) rest area.

The proposed Pelham communications tower facility would meet current RF coverage needs of the North Carolina Highway Patrol in Caswell County and surrounding areas. Due to the elevation of the proposed site, and the topographic features of the surrounding area, the site would provide RF coverage for Caswell 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 300-ft self-support tower. The site is strategically located, expanding the coverage radius for Caswell 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 an 8.92-acre property, reportedly owned by the NCDOT. The property was occupied by a NCDOT rest area facility located at the intersection of U.S. Highway 29 and NC Highway 700; the proposed tower site would be located adjacent to the rest area. The alternative site was not permitted by the NCDOT as the proposed tower facility was not cohesive with NCDOT's long term development plans. Based on these concerns, this proposed alternative was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

Additionally, existing towers within the North Carolina Highway Patrol service area were examined to determine the collocation potential for the North Carolina VIPER System antennas, microwave dishes, and associated equipment. However, analyses of the existing towers determined that there were no viable collocation opportunities that would satisfy the radio frequency coverage needs of the North Carolina 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 Pelham communications facility is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Caswell 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 North Carolina

VIPER network, and provide greater security and facility control. The No Action Alternative would not address the communications needs for Caswell 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 one endangered species was identified for Caswell County, North Carolina – the James (Virginia) spiny mussel (*Pleurobema collina*). 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. Habitat for this species was compared to the habitat present at the proposed site; the species' habitat was 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 State Historic Preservation Office (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 (Danville) 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 National Register of Historic Places 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 0.75 mile area of potential effect (APE) of the site. Letters were sent to the Milton Historic Preservation Commission, Caswell County Historical Association and the Caswell County Planning Department on October 20, 2010, inviting them to be a consulting party regarding any potential impact to historical or archaeological resources in the area. In addition, the NC SHPO and the appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Officers of the Federally Recognized Native American Tribes with known ancestral rights to Caswell County were consulted to determine the 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 Caswell Messenger* on October 20, 2010. No comments were received. Additional concurrence was received for the 0.75 mile APE from the NC Department of Cultural Resources-Environmental Review Coordinator (NC SHPO) on October 10, 2010 that the Proposed Action would have "no adverse effect" on historic properties.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Pelham communications tower 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 300-ft self-support communications tower and associated equipment with ground disturbance activities (totaling 0.058 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 March 2011 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower at 853 NC Highway 700, Pelham, NC (Caswell County) EA accurately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed development including a 300-ft self-support 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 March 2011 EA for the 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower at 853 NC Highway 700, Pelham, NC (Caswell County). 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

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Responsible Program Manager

Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration

4/25/11

Date

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Title of document being adopted: 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower at 853 NC Highway 700, Pelham, NC (Caswell County) EA

Proponent: North Carolina State Administrative Agency (SAA)

Location of current proposal: Pelham, Caswell County, North Carolina

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

Date adopted document was prepared: March 8, 2011

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The proposed Pelham communications tower facility would include a 300-ft self-support communications tower with a 11.5 ft x 19 ft equipment shelter and a standalone 40-kilowatt diesel emergency generator mounted on a 5.5 ft x 9.5 ft concrete foundation pad. All components would be contained within an irregular shaped 40 ft x 21 ft x 37 ft x 8 ft x 29 ft x 29 ft fenced compound. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.058 acres. The site would be located on an approximately 82.05-acre property, reportedly owned by Caswell County. A proposed 12 ft wide access drive would proceed north-northwest from an existing gravel drive for approximately 48 ft before reaching the proposed fenced tower compound. The site is located within an active agricultural field and undeveloped forested land on the parent property, north of a convenience/ liquor store and northwest of a North Carolina Department of Transportation rest area. 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:

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