

Finding of No Significant Impact for Proposed Franklin Water Tower 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower

Introduction

The North Carolina (NC) Highway Patrol – Department of Crime and Public Safety proposes to construct a 300-foot (ft) self-support lattice tower in Macon County, North Carolina. The Proposed 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower at the Franklin Water Tower (WT) on Addington Bridge Road, Franklin, NC (Macon County) Environmental Assessment (EA), further referenced as the Franklin WT 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 construct this tower and associated equipment.

Scope of the Environmental Assessment (EA)

The proposed Franklin WT tower project 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 Franklin WT tower project is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Franklin WT tower project would allow for the following:

- Increased radio frequency (RF) coverage area for Federal, State, and local emergency first responders connected through the North Carolina 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 construct the Franklin WT tower project in Franklin, Macon County, North Carolina. The proposed project would include the construction of 300-ft self-support lattice communications tower with an irregular shaped compound with dimensions measuring 40-ft x 26-ft x 30-ft x 5-ft x 37-ft x 20-ft with one 11.5-ft x 19-ft equipment shelter and a stand-alone 40-kilowatt (kW) diesel emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft x 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad. The parent property is primarily occupied by undeveloped forested and municipal land uses associated with an existing water tank. All components would be contained within the enclosed, irregular shaped fenced compound. The area of disturbance associated with the proposed fenced compound and access drive is anticipated to total approximately 3,316-square feet (sq-ft) (0.08-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 Franklin WT tower project in its entirety, consisting of a 300-ft self-support lattice tower that would be enclosed

within an irregular shaped compound with dimensions measuring 40-ft x 26-ft x 30-ft x 5-ft x 37-ft x 20-ft with one 11.5-ft x 19-ft equipment shelter and a stand-alone 40 kW diesel emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft x 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad. The proposed facility would be located south of the Town of Franklin in central Macon County, NC in an area of municipal, undeveloped forested and low-density residential land uses. The 6.47 acre parent property, reportedly owned by Macon County, is primarily occupied by undeveloped forested and municipal land uses associated with an existing flush mounted water tank. All components would be contained within the enclosed, irregular shaped fenced compound. The total area of disturbance associated with the proposed fenced compound and access drive is anticipated to total approximately 3,316 sq-ft (0.08-acres). The proposed access and utility easement proceeds east-northeast from the terminus of South Macon Court along an existing gravel drive that uses a series of switchbacks to traverse the steep terrain before turning east-southeast and continuing an additional 68-ft through undeveloped forested land uses until reaching the proposed compound.

Due to the elevation of the proposed site, and the topographic features of the surrounding area, the proposed site would provide suitable RF coverage for Macon 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 would provide a natural height advantage, resulting in enhanced coverage with the proposed 300-ft self-support lattice tower. The site is strategically located, expanding the coverage radius for Macon 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 NC 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 examined was within a 27.4-acre property, reportedly owned by the NC State Highway Commission and currently occupied by a Department of Transportation facility in an undeveloped forested portion of the property, located north of a portion of Trimont Trail and south of a portion of Windy Gap Road within the Town of Franklin. This alternative was dismissed as a feasible alternative due to community opposition and zoning setback restrictions that had the potential to reduce the height of the proposed tower, therefore restricting the suitability of the site. Based on these concerns, the proposed alternative was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

There were no viable collocation opportunities that would satisfy the RF coverage needs of the State VIPER Emergency Services Communications System. 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 Franklin WT tower project is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Macon County and the NC 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 Macon County.

Consultations

The proposed site is located on a 6.47-acre parcel primarily occupied by undeveloped forested land uses and an existing water tank. Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet the Section 7 requirements of the Endangered Species Act 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. The USFWS Web site and correspondence with the USFWS Asheville Field Office identified six terrestrial listed species for Macon County, including the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), Appalachian elktoe (*Alasmidonta raveneliana*), Little-wing pearly mussel (*Pegias fibula*), Small whorled pogonia (*Isotria medeoloides*), Virginia spiraea (*Spiraea virginiana*), and Rock gnome lichen (*Gymnoderma lineare*). Site surveys were conducted at the proposed site; no burrows, nests, wetlands, coastal areas or other signs of listed species and/or critical habitat were readily observable.

The USFWS Asheville Field Office identified that the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) is considered a summer resident of Macon County. Indiana bats roost under loose tree bark and have been known to roost in trees as small as 3-inches in diameter. Since trees would be removed in association with the construction of the proposed Franklin tower facility, direct impacts to the Indiana bat would be avoided by conducting all tree removal between October 15 and April 15. According to the USFWS response dated April 26, 2011, if all tree removal can be accomplished in non-summer months (October 15 and April 15), the USFWS concurred that the proposed facility would not affect any federally listed species, any formerly designated critical habitat, or species currently proposed for federal listing. Therefore, it is not likely that the construction of the proposed tower would affect listed species or their critical habitats.

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 of the pertinent U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute topographic map (Prentiss) to assess the potential significant impacts to architectural, historic or archeological sites in the vicinity of the proposed site. In addition, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken concluding that no archaeological resources eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places would be impacted.

A consultation letter was submitted to NC SHPO 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 Addington House Association, Macon County Historical Society, and the Macon County Department of Planning, Permitting, and Development on April 12, 2011, 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 Macon County were consulted. No comments were received. A public notice was issued related to impacts to historic and cultural resources in *The Franklin Press* on April 20, 2011. Additional concurrence was received for the 0.75 mile APE from the NC SHPO on April 7, 2011 that the Proposed Action would "not adversely effect" historic properties.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Franklin WT tower project 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 300-ft self-support lattice communications tower and associated equipment with ground disturbance activities (totaling 0.08 acres). In accordance with 47 Code of Federal Regulations 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.

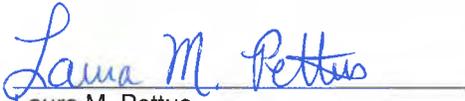
NTIA Review

NTIA determined that the June 2011 Proposed 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower in Franklin, NC (Macon County) EA accurately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed development including a 300-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 June 2011 EA for the Proposed 30-foot Self-Support Communications Tower in Franklin, NC (Macon 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
Responsible Program Manager
Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration

7/6/11
Date

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Title of document being adopted: Proposed 300-foot Self-Support Communications Tower in Franklin, NC (Macon County) EA

Proponent: North Carolina (NC) State Administrative Agency (SAA)

Location of current proposal: Addington Bridge Road, Franklin (Macon County), North Carolina

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

Date adopted document was prepared: June 1, 2011

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The proposed Franklin Water Tower tower project would include a 300-foot (ft) self-support lattice tower that would be enclosed within an irregular shaped compound with dimensions measuring 40-ft x 26-ft x 30-ft x 5-ft x 37-ft x 20-ft with one 11.5-ft x 19-ft equipment shelter and a stand-alone 40-kilowatt diesel emergency generator mounted on a 5.5-ft x 9.5-ft concrete foundation pad. The proposed facility would be located south of the Town of Franklin in central Macon County, NC in an area of municipal, undeveloped forested and low-density residential land uses. The 6.47 acre parent property, reportedly owned by Macon County, is primarily occupied by undeveloped forested and municipal land uses associated with an existing flush mounted water tank. All components would be contained within the enclosed, irregular shaped fenced compound. The area of disturbance associated with the proposed fenced compound and access drive is anticipated to total approximately 3,316 sq-ft (0.08-acres). The tower and site construction for this Proposed Action do 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:

Laura M. Pettus

7/6/11