

Finding of No Significant Impact for Sandy Ridge 420-foot Self-Support Communications Tower

Introduction

The North Carolina Highway Patrol – Department of Crime and Public Safety proposes to develop a new communications site by acquiring and installing a 420-foot self-support tower in Stokes County, North Carolina. The Draft Sandy Ridge 420-foot Self-Support Communications Tower Environmental Assessment (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 Sandy Ridge communications site 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 Sandy Ridge site is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Sandy Ridge communications site 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 Draft EA examines the Proposed Action to develop a new communications facility at Sandy Ridge in Stokes County, North Carolina. The proposed project would include the construction of a 420-foot self-support communications tower, an 11'6" by 19' prefabricated equipment shelter, and a stand alone 80 kilowatt (kW) diesel emergency generator mounted on a 4' by 8' concrete foundation pad contained within a 60' by 60' fenced compound with associated equipment. The total ground disturbance would be 0.083 acres. The proposed site would be situated on an undeveloped forest portion of the 7.23-acre parent property reportedly owned by the Northeast Stokes Volunteer Fire Department in Sandy Ridge, Stokes County, North Carolina. Existing utilities for electrical power are present along Highway 704 East and would be slightly extended to allow the new equipment to connect with existing infrastructure. An existing access road would be used for construction and operational maintenance site access. The Draft 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 Sandy Ridge communications site in its entirety, consisting of a 420-foot self-support communications tower, an 11'6" by 19' prefabricated equipment shelter, and a stand alone 80 kilowatt (kW) diesel emergency generator mounted on a 4' by 8' concrete foundation pad contained within a 60' by 60' fenced compound. The proposed Sandy Ridge communications site would meet current RF coverage needs of the North Carolina Highway Patrol in Stokes County and surrounding counties within North Carolina. Due to the elevation of the proposed Sandy Ridge site, and the topographic features of the surrounding area, the proposed site would provide RF coverage for northeastern Stokes 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 420-foot self-support communications tower.

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. Ongoing maintenance activities would continue using the current funding sources; however, no new activities would be funded with PSIC grant funds. 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 Draft EA.

Alternatives Considered But Not Carried Forward

Two alternative sites were examined to determine the range of reasonable alternatives to implement the Proposed Action. Both of the alternate sites were located within the 7.23-acre parent property, reportedly owned by the Northeast Stokes Volunteer Fire Department. One alternative site examined was located on the southwestern most portion of the parent property within an existing maintained grass field. The existing topography and lower elevation of the property would require the proposed tower height to be increased in order to provide the same coverage area as the tower associated with Alternative 1. In addition, the site would require a significantly larger proposed construction area to account for the increased length of the access and utilities easement that would be required to access the compound. Based on these factors, and due to the proximity of an existing helipad location, this proposed alternative was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

The other alternative site considered was located on the northern portion of the 7.23-acre parent property within an existing stand of young pine and hardwood trees that serve as the property border. The site would be located approximately 100' northeast of an existing groundwater well and buried propane tank. The proposed construction area for this alternative would be greater than that of Alternative 1 in order to account for the increased access drive needed to access the tower compound. In addition, this site would be located at a lower elevation than Alternative 1 and would require an increase in tower height in order to provide the same coverage area. Based on these factors, this proposed alternative was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) to construct the proposed Sandy Ridge communications site is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Stokes 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 Stokes 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 Asheville Field Office, only three endangered species were identified for Stokes County, North Carolina including the James Spiny mussel (*Pleurobema collina*), Schweinitz's Sunflower (*Helianthus schweinitzii*), and Small-anthered Bittercress (*Cardamine micranthera*). 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 Asheville Field Office concurred with the determination on April 23, 2009 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 North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the North Carolina 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 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 Stokes County Historical Society and the Stokes County Planning and Inspections Department on April 3, 2009 related to any potential impacts to historical or archaeological resources in the area. A response letter was received from the Stokes County Historical Society on April 17, 2009 concurring with the determination that the Proposed Action would not impact historical or archaeological resources in the area. Appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) of Federally-recognized Native American Tribes with known ancestral rights to Stokes 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 *Stokes News* on February 26, 2009. No public or agency comments were received. In addition, the North Carolina SHPO concurred with the Draft EA that the Proposed Action would have no effect on historic properties.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Sandy Ridge communications site 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 420-foot self-support communications tower and associated equipment with ground disturbance activities (totaling 0.083 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.

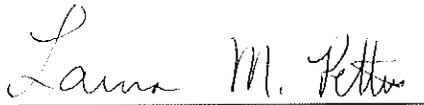
NTIA Review

NTIA determined that the March 2010 Sandy Ridge 420-ft Self-Support Communications Tower Draft EA accurately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed development including a 420-foot self-support communications tower and that the scope, alternatives considered, and content of the EA are adequate.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on the attached Draft 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 2010 Sandy Ridge 420-foot Self-Support Communications Tower Draft EA. The Draft 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 Draft EA, which is the basis for this FONSI. Based on the information in the Draft EA and this FONSI document, I agree that the Proposed Action as described above, and in the Draft EA, will have no significant impact on the environment.



Laura M. Pettus
Laura M. Pettus
Responsible Program Manager
Department of Commerce
National Telecommunications and Information Administration

4/14/10
Date

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Description of proposal: Sandy Ridge 420-foot Self-Support Communications Tower Facility

Proponent: North Carolina State Administrative Agency (SAA)

Location of current proposal: Sandy Ridge, Stokes County, North Carolina

Title of document being adopted: Sandy Ridge 420-foot Self-Support Communications Tower

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

Date adopted document was prepared: March 4, 2010

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The proposed Sandy Ridge project would include a 420-foot self-support communications tower with a 11'6" by 19' equipment shelter, a stand alone 80 kilowatt (kW) diesel emergency generator mounted on a 4' by 8' concrete foundation pad, and associated telecommunications equipment contained within a 60-foot by 60-foot fenced compound. The total ground-disturbance would be 0.083 acres. The proposed site would be situated on an undeveloped forest portion of the 7.23-acre parent property reportedly owned by the Northeast Stokes Volunteer Fire Department in Sandy Ridge, Stokes County, North Carolina. Existing utilities for electrical power are present along Highway 704 East and would be slightly extended to allow the new equipment to connect with existing infrastructure. An existing access road would be used for construction and operational maintenance site access. 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 NTIA's 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: National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

Contact person if other than responsible official: N/A

Responsible Official: Laura M. Pettus

Position/Title: Communications Program Specialist

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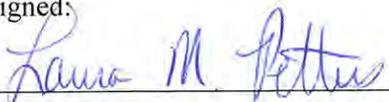
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DATE OF ISSUE: April 14, 2010

SIGNATURE:

Signed:



Date:

