

Finding of No Significant Impact for the Hallam Nebraska Communications Tower Site Environmental Assessment

Introduction

The State of Nebraska proposes to construct a 360-foot (ft) self supporting tower and associated support structures enclosed within a 70 ft by 80 ft fenced compound. The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Hallam Communications Tower 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 tower construction and installation of associated equipment.

Scope of the Environmental Assessment

The proposed Hallam Communications Tower project would apply funds issued by the PSIC Grant Program. The PSIC Grant Program was developed to assist State, local, tribal, and nongovernmental agencies in developing interoperable communications. 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., towers) to the acquisition of mobile and portable radios. As outlined in the PSIC Grant Program's Programmatic EA (February 2009) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (April 2009), the Hallam Communications Tower project is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The Hallam Communications Tower project would allow for the following:

- Provide enhanced radio coverage, remediate coverage deficiencies that exist for public safety first responders;
- Provide updated equipment to replace aging resources, at a consolidated site to a public safety standard, with room for expansion; and
- Provide reliable interoperable communications in the region for public safety responders of all disciplines.

This EA examines the Proposed Action to develop communications resources including very high frequency (VHF) voice and paging, ultra high frequency (UHF) voice and paging, and 800 MegaHertz (MHz) communications utilized by all public first responders in the region. The proposed site would be on an existing gravel surfaced storage lot for ammonia fertilizer tanks located at 4525 West Hallam Road, Hallam, Nebraska. The Proposed Action would construct 360-ft self supporting communications tower on an existing 70 ft x 90 ft parcel of land with crushed rock surface. The proposed communications site would also include a 12 ft x 20 ft prefabricated equipment shelter to house needed electronics, a 30 kilowatt (kW) propane

generator, and a 1,000 gallon propane tank. Total ground disturbance for the project would be approximately 0.145 acres. The proposed project would tie into the existing power system by using existing overhead power lines and a meter pedestal. The project site is accessible through an existing gravel access road.

The EA analyzes existing conditions and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action within 11 major 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 – Hallam Tower Site (Preferred Alternative).

The proposed tower site would be a 70 ft x 90 ft leased area on an existing crushed rock surfaced parcel, located in rural Lancaster County, Nebraska. The proposed tower site is approximately 0.25 miles east of the village of Hallam at a location commonly known as 4525 W. Hallam Rd, Hallam, Nebraska. This parcel of land is leased from the private land owner by the City of Lincoln with a 25 year renewable lease.

The new facility would utilize an existing gravel access road for site access by construction and operational maintenance vehicles. Ground disturbing activities, which would take place for approximately 30 days, would consist of minimal grading, digging with the use of a dozer, drilling for the tower base and footings, and the use of a mobile crane for erecting the tower. The proposed telecommunications compound would include one 12 ft x 20 ft prefabricated masonry equipment shelter with associated electrical equipment, a standalone emergency backup generator and an associated propane tank would be installed. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.145 acres within the existing fenced compound.

The proposed site topography provides natural height (1,485 ft elevation) resulting in enhanced coverage with the proposed 360-ft self-supporting tower. The location of the site relative to the Lancaster/Gage County border and the U.S. Highway 77 corridor is ideally suited to provide enhanced coverage and interoperability to the area. This would allow the consolidation of numerous poorly performing communications resources in the area to a site constructed to a public safety standard. The proposed site also provides for additional future expansion to help minimize the number of new towers needed in the area.

No Action Alternative.

Under the No Action Alternative, the current radio system coverage and capacity requirements would not be met causing serious continued deficiencies hampering public safety responses in the region. Public safety agencies in both Lancaster and Gage Counties specifically would continue to operate with very unreliable coverage in several RF bands across multiple disciplines. The No Action Alternative would not address the needs of interoperability and contiguous radio coverage for emergency service personnel. 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

Multiple alternatives were examined to determine the range of reasonable alternatives to implement the Proposed Action. Prior to identifying the proposed site for this project, a needs assessment was completed that identified the coverage deficiencies, public safety agencies effected, relevant frequencies involved, the operational requirements of all of the public safety agencies in the region, and then contrasted against population and highway traffic concentrations. From this assessment, an optimum site location was developed and verified with propagation studies. This optimum location was generally located along the Lancaster-Gage County border and the U.S. Highway 77 corridor. Using this optimum location, all of the existing towers in the area were identified and physically surveyed. However, analyses of existing towers in the area determined that there were no viable collocation opportunities that would satisfy the radio frequency coverage needs and none of the existing tower facilities could accommodate the new equipment without a minimum structural retrofitting of an existing tower and other equipment upgrades. Based on these factors, collocating equipment at existing tower sites was not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

Several possible locations for a new tower site were also identified and explored. Many of the sites were discounted because land owners were unwilling to lease land or the cost was prohibitive. Further research narrowed the alternatives to the Hallam area. During this time the Hallam Village Board was consulted and several other sites were discounted because they were unpalatable to the village primarily for aesthetic reasons. The proposed site was identified at the suggestion of a member of the Hallam Village Board. The proposed site has an existing access to a paved county road and electrical service and provides a technically appropriate area to locate this facility. Within this area, an extremely limited number of sites from which to choose were available to pursue. Based on these factors, these proposed alternatives were not carried forward as a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Action.

Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (*Preferred Alternative*) to implement the Hallam Tower site is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need to strengthen the overall local and regional communications capabilities by constructing a 360-ft self supported tower and associated support structures within a fenced compound. The No Action Alternative would not address the need for increased radio coverage along the U.S. Highway 77 corridor.

Consultations

Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet Section 7 requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was accomplished through a preliminary review of endangered species using the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Division of Endangered Species website to identify listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, as well as critical habitats that may be located on or near the proposed site. Species federally listed in Lancaster County include: one endangered insect species (Salt Creek Tiger Beetle-*Cicindela nevadica lincolniana*) and one threatened plant species (Western Prairie Fringed Orchid-*Platanthera praeclara*). Habitats for these species were compared to the habitat observed at the proposed site; the species' habitats were not identified as having a potential to be present on the proposed site. The USFWS indicated in a letter dated

August 16, 2010, that it “appears unlikely that your project would have any significant environmental impacts on the trust resources under our authority”.

In addition to the USFWS, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) was consulted regarding impacts to endangered species and migratory birds. In a response dated July 2, 2010, the NGPC stated the proposed project would have no adverse affect on State-listed threatened or endangered species and would not impact any NGPC State Park, Recreation Area, or Wildlife Management Areas. The NGPC also recommended compliance with USFWS best management practices for reducing bird strikes, which includes the use of flashing white lights with 3-4 seconds of dark phase vice solid red or pulsating beacons.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished through consultation with the Nebraska State Historic Society to determine whether the construction of the proposed project 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. The construction of the proposed tower may indirectly impact the viewshed of architectural resources in the area if it is not aesthetically compatible with the character of the historic surroundings. The proposed project is located in leased portion of private land approximately 0.25 miles east of the village of Hallam. A letter was submitted to the Nebraska State Historical Society for review of the proposed project. The Nebraska State Historical Society’s reply dated August 17, 2010 concurred with the determination that the proposed site does not contain recorded historic resources and that a survey for unrecorded cultural resources would not be required.

Letters to determine the effect of the Proposed Action were sent to the appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) of the Federally recognized Native American Tribes with known ancestral rights to Lancaster and Gage Counties. Letters dated July 30, 2010 were sent to the Santee Sioux, Winnebago, Omaha, and Ponca tribal councils; no responses were received.

In addition, the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department reviewed the project via letter and replied on August 13, 2010 with the determination that “Our review of this project has not identified any serious potential negative public health impacts.”

The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District was contacted via letter to review the project and replied on July 30, 2010 that the project “will not have any negative impact on groundwater or related resources.”

The Army Corps of Engineers was contacted via letter to review the project and replied on September 10, 2010 that no permit pursuant to Section 404 is required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Hallam Communications 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 new 360-ft transmitting and receiving communications tower and associated equipment with ground disturbance totaling no more than 0.145 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.

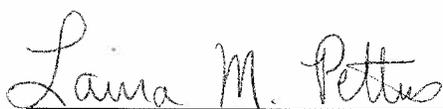
NTIA Review

NTIA determined that the May 2011 EA for the Hallam Communications Tower adequately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the new 360-ft transmitting and receiving communications tower and associate equipment, 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 May 2011 EA for the Hallam 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 the NEPA of 1969. The decision documents for the environmental review of the Proposed Action are attached.

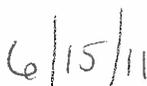
I have considered the information contained in the EA, and supporting documentation which is the basis for this FONSI. Based on the information in the EA and this FONSI document, I agree that the Proposed Action as described above, and in the EA, would have no significant impact on the environment.



Laura M. Pettus

Responsible Program Manager

Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration



Date

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Title of document being adopted: Environmental Assessment for Hallam Tower

Proponent: Hallam, Nebraska

Location of current proposal: 4525 West Hallam Road, Hallam, Nebraska

Agency that prepared document being adopted: Lincoln Police Department and Nebraska Emergency Management

Date adopted document was prepared: May 1, 2011

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The proposed Hallam communications tower project is to construct a 360-ft self-supporting communications tower inside an 70 ft by 90 ft fenced compound. Within the compound, a 12 ft by 20 ft prefabricated equipment shelter would house needed electronics and a 30 kilowatt (kW) propane powered generator would provide backup power to the site during electrical outages. The proposed project would be located on private property leased by the City of Lincoln and would tie into the existing power system using existing overhead powerlines and an existing meter pedestal. The total ground disturbance would be approximately 0.145 acres. The tower and site construction and equipment acquisition and installation for this proposed project 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 (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: NTIA

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6/15/11