

Finding of No Significant Impact for the proposed Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 90-foot guyed tower

Introduction

Stanislaus County proposes to acquire and install a 90-foot guyed telecommunications radio tower and associated equipment in Modesto, California. Stanislaus County applied to the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program to build the proposed tower on top of an existing government building in downtown Modesto. The Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 90-foot guyed telecommunications tower Environmental Assessment (EA) (December 8, 2010) provides an analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with the use of grant funds issued by the PSIC Grant Program, administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Scope of the Environmental Assessment

The proposed Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 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 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 grant funds can range from the installation of new large-scale infrastructure (i.e., telecommunications towers or facilities) to the acquisition of mobile and portable radio equipment. Under the categories outlined in the PSIC Grant Program's Programmatic EA (February 2009) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (April 2009), the proposed Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 tower project is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 tower site (to be located on top of an existing building) would:

- Provide a single system approach to law enforcement and other public safety agencies within Stanislaus County;
- Provide for interoperability between law enforcement agencies and between law enforcement and other participating agencies;
- Enhance officer safety by improving in-building penetration, talk-in, and talk-out effectiveness for officers using handheld radios;
- Upgrade backbone infrastructure equipment, which is beyond its service life and also not usable after the narrow banding mandate deadline of January 2013; and
- Provide a system which is Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Project 25 (P-25) compliant (APCO P-25 compliance is required for all public safety radio systems purchased with grant funding).

The Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 EA examines the Proposed Action to develop a new telecommunications facility in Stanislaus County, California. The proposed Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 tower project would include the construction of a 90-foot guyed telecommunications radio tower and associated equipment on the roof of an existing City-owned building with an entry port in the existing room at 1010 10th Street location. In addition, new AC power outlets would be installed off of the existing uninterruptable power supply (UPS) and back-up generator circuits. Grounding and cable management systems would be installed within a new communications room. Once the tower and communications room are complete,

equipment from four other downtown Modesto communications sites would be moved to the 1010 10th Street site starting with the microwave shot to Mt. Oso and dispatch center. The new VHF simulcast system and 700-800 MHz trunked system would also be installed at this location. This site would serve as the main communications site for Stanislaus County and house the master controller and prime site controller for a new trunking system. No ground disturbance would occur. 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 – Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 tower at 1010 10th Street, Modesto

One of the primary goals of this project was to co-locate equipment at existing City or County property or at existing communications sites to reduce the overall environmental impact, project costs, and duplication of equipment and allow sharing of back haul equipment and all operating and maintenance costs among different County and City agencies. Alternative 1 would implement the Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 tower project in its entirety, consisting of a 90-foot guyed tower, AC power outlets, grounding and cable management systems, and consolidation of trunking and controller equipment. The proposed project would be located on City-owned property located at 1010 10th Street in downtown Modesto, Stanislaus County. No ground disturbance would occur. The site provides enhanced coverage with the proposed 90-foot guyed tower, greatly reducing the retrofits that would be required. The proposed site would consolidate four other communication sites to reduce the number of new towers needed.

No Action Alternative

The No Action alternative would not meet the current radio system coverage requirements causing serious limitations on security and 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 funding. It is assumed that the project proposed for PSIC grant funding would not go forward with any alternative 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

Several alternatives were examined to determine the range of reasonable alternatives to implement the Proposed Action, particularly for a site in downtown Modesto to provide in-building radio coverage inside of heavily constructed buildings in the area. A review of eight new or existing facilities in downtown Modesto were evaluated. Of these eight sites, six were already developed with a tower and communications room. However, none of these six sites had available space on the existing towers to mount the required antennas or microwave dishes for this project, or the tower would be over the maximum wind load rating. In addition, none of these six sites had the required space in the communications room to install the new equipment. Other issues with the reviewed sites included a high radio frequency noise floor due to inter-modulation problems¹, rusted towers and mounting brackets, and lack of proper transmitter isolation. Therefore, based on these issues, these site alternatives were considered and not carried forward.

Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) to acquire and install a new 90-foot guyed tower, AC power outlets, grounding and cable management systems, and consolidation of trunking and controller equipment at the

¹ Inter-modulation is a radio frequency phenomenon significantly effecting radio sites and associated systems causing loud noises on the channels audible to both console operators and subscribers, thus interfering with the effective use of the channel.

Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 building downtown Modesto, is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Stanislaus County. The Preferred Alternative would provide a single system approach for law enforcement and other public safety agencies within Stanislaus County and provide interoperability among law enforcement and other participating agencies with an APCO P-25 compliant system. The No Action Alternative would not address the need for Stanislaus County.

Consultations

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. The review was conducted to identify listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, as well as critical habitats that may be located on or near the proposed tower site. Several special-status species have been identified within Stanislaus County. Based on data from the USFWS's Critical Habitat Mapper, none of the special-status species or habitats exist at or are located in the vicinity of the project site in downtown Modesto. While the Central Valley is home to a vast number of wintering birds, the Central Valley Joint Venture, USFWS, and other sources indicate that the major flyway through Central Valley lies to the west of Modesto, along the corridor of wildlife refuges. The construction of the proposed tower would start prior to the start of migration season in the Central Valley. Consultation with the USFWS was submitted on October 21, 2010. As of December 8, 2010, no response has been received for Section 7 consultation. The proposed tower is not anticipated to have an adverse impact to wildlife, wildlife habitats, or vegetation.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished through an informal consultation with the California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to determine whether the construction of the proposed tower and installation of associated equipment 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 guyed 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 Stanislaus County General Plan identifies two chief historical areas within Stanislaus County: Knights Ferry and La Grange, located approximately 22 and 30 miles, respectively, from the project site. A desktop assessment was conducted to determine if any historic and cultural resources were listed in the area of potential effect (APE).

Based on the desktop assessment, the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and the City of Modesto Landmark Preservation Sites identified the following properties within a quarter-mile radius of the project site that have been listed on or have been determined eligible for the NRHP: U.S. Post Office (I and Twelfth Streets), Teamsters Hall, State Theater, Abel and Ellman Office, Beatty Building, Southern Pacific Transportation Center, St. Stanislaus Catholic Church, and the Modesto Arch. The project site is located on top of an existing 101-foot tall building at 1010 10th Street in downtown Modesto. The building was constructed in 1999 and serves as the seat of government for both the City of Modesto and the County of Stanislaus. The proposed 90-foot guyed tower would be secured on the building rooftop. Existing equipment located on the rooftop include an air conditioning unit, generator, microwave system, Global Positioning System (GPS) system, and a mobile data transmitter antennae. On November 4, 2010, the California SHPO concurred that the APE was properly determined and documented and that the finding of no historic properties affected by the Proposed Action was appropriate.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 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 90-foot guyed telecommunications tower and associated equipment with no ground disturbance. 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 December 2010 Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 Tower EA adequately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed telecommunications facility development including a 90-foot guyed telecommunications 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 December 2010 Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 Tower EA. The EA is available for public review at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/>. 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, 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

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

2/14/11

Date

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Title of document being adopted: December 2010 Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 Tower Environmental Assessment

Proponent: Stanislaus County, California

Location of current proposal: Modesto, Stanislaus County, California

Agency that prepared document being adopted: Stanislaus County Regional 9-1-1 Center Technical Staff

Date adopted document was prepared: December 2010

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The proposed Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 tower project would consist of a 90-foot guyed tower, AC power outlets, grounding and cable management systems, and consolidation of trunking and controller equipment. The proposed project would be located on the rooftop of existing City-owned property located at 1010 10th Street in downtown Modesto, Stanislaus County. Utility connections currently exist at the project site. The tower and equipment acquisition and installation 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>

The Department of Commerce has identified and adopted this document as being appropriate for National Telecommunications and Information Administration's purposes after independent review. The document meets its environmental review needs for approval under the Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grant Program and will accompany the proposal to the decision maker.

Name of agency adopting the document: National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

Responsible Official: Laura M. Pettus

Position/Title: Responsible Program Manager

Address: NTIA, Room 4812, 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., 20230

Contact: Laura Pettus

Phone: (202) 482-4509 **Fax:** (202) 501-8013 **e-mail:** lpettus@ntia.doc.gov

Signed:

Date:

Laura M. Pettus

2/14/11