

Finding of No Significant Impact for proposed Wallisville Tower Telecommunications Facility

Introduction

Harris County proposes to acquire and install a 200-foot self-supporting telecommunications radio tower and associated equipment in Wallisville, Texas. The Wallisville Tower Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) (March 25, 2010) 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. Harris County is located in the eastern part of the State of Texas within the Houston-Sugarland-Baytown metropolitan area.

Scope of the Environmental Assessment

The proposed Wallisville 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 Wallisville tower telecommunications facility project is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Wallisville tower telecommunications facility project would allow for the following:

- New equipment to support new frequencies to improve and expand voice and data coverage;
- Facilitate reliable interoperable communications among first responder organizations;
- Enhanced security and facility control;
- New telecommunications facility with new self-support tower; and
- Equipment consolidation.

This Draft EA examines the proposed action to develop a new telecommunications facility in Harris County, Texas. The proposed Wallisville tower telecommunications facility project would include the construction of a 200-foot self-support telecommunications radio tower (no guy wires) with associated equipment. In addition, a 12-foot by 26-foot equipment shelter with integrated generator room, new utility rack with meter, a 1,000 gallon liquid propane tank, two 7-foot swing gates, an 8-foot security fence and gravel site surfacing would also be installed. Two antennas, two microwave dishes, and a lightning rod would be installed on the proposed tower. One receiving (RX) antenna and one transmission (TX) antenna would each be mounted on the tower at 182-feet. The two microwave dishes would be mounted at 160-feet and 182-feet, and the lightning rod would not exceed 199-feet. The total ground-disturbance is less than 0.25 acres. The area surrounding the proposed site is previously disturbed land with an existing 190-foot self-support telecommunication tower (FCC Antenna Structure Registration: 1267233) within an urban development of Harris County. Existing utilities for electrical power would be slightly extended for access to grid power. This Draft EA analyses 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, land use, aesthetic and visual, infrastructure, socioeconomic resources, and human health and safety).

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) would implement the Wallisville tower telecommunications facility project in its entirety, consisting of a 200-foot self-support tower (no guy wires), a 12-foot by 26-foot equipment shelter with integrated generator room, new utility rack with meter, a 1,000 gallon liquid propane tank, two 7-foot swing gates, an 8-foot security fence and gravel site surfacing would also be installed. Two antennas, two microwave dishes, and a lightning rod would be installed on the proposed tower. The proposed Wallisville tower telecommunications facility project would facilitate enhanced security and facility control, reliable interoperable communications, and significant increased coverage area for emergency responders. The addition of a new telecommunications tower and associated equipment to the previously disturbed site would avoid significant environmental impacts.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, current radio system coverage requirements would not be met causing serious limitations 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 using PSIC grant funds. The Proposed Action would not move forward with PSIC funds or any alternate funding sources. The No Action Alternative served as the baseline for assessing the impacts of the alternatives in the EA.

Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Harris County to acquire and install a new 200-foot self-support telecommunications tower and associated equipment at the Wallisville, Texas site. The Preferred Alternative would facilitate greater security and facility control, reliable interoperable communications, and significant increased coverage area for emergency responders. The No Action Alternative would not address the need for Harris 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 to identify listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, as well as critical habitats that may be located on or near the proposed Wallisville tower site. Based on a review of the USFWS web site, only two endangered species were identified for Harris County, including the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and Texas Prairie Dawn-flower (*Hymenoxys texana*). Habitats for these species were compared to the habitat present at the proposed site; none of the habitats were identified having a potential to be found on the proposed site. The USFWS has provided instructions that after completing a habitat evaluation or any necessary surveys, any tower projects determined to have “no effect” determination do not require coordination with the USFWS. USFWS concurrence with the conclusions of the EA that the Proposed Action has no effect on protected species or their habitats as none are present is assumed.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished through an informal consultation with the Texas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to determine whether the construction of the proposed Wallisville tower and installation of associated antennae, microwave links, and infrastructure 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. A desktop assessment was conducted to determine if any historic and cultural resources were listed in the area of potential effect. Historic, cultural, or tribal resources were not identified on or within 0.75 miles of the proposed site based on a desktop database review conducted of the Texas Historic Commission – Site Atlas. In addition, the Texas SHPO concurred on February 4, 2010 that there are no historic properties affected by the Proposed Action and the project may proceed.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Wallisville tower telecommunications facility 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 will require construction of a new 200-foot self-support telecommunications tower having no guy wires and with ground disturbance activities totaling less than 0.25 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/or antenna and associated equipment control cabinets were constructed at the proposed site location. No FCC special interest items were identified.

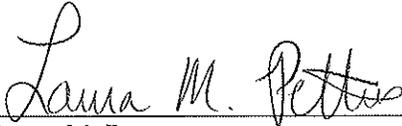
NTIA Review

NTIA determined that the March 2010 Wallisville Tower Draft EA adequately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed telecommunication facility development including a 200-foot self-support telecommunications tower, and that the scope, alternatives considered, and content of the EA are adequate.

This 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 Wallisville Tower Draft EA. The Draft 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 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
Responsible Program Manager
Department of Commerce
National Telecommunications and Information Administration

9/13/10

Date

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Title of document being adopted: Proposed Telecommunications Facility with 200-foot Self-Supporting Tower – Wallisville

Proponent: Harris County, Texas

Location of current proposal: Houston, Harris County, Texas

Agency that prepared document being adopted: Harris County

Date adopted document was prepared: March 25, 2010

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The Wallisville Tower Draft EA examines the proposed action to develop a new telecommunications facility in Harris County, Texas. The proposed Wallisville tower telecommunications facility project would include the construction of a 200-foot self-support telecommunications tower (no guy wires) with associated equipment. In addition, a 12-foot by 26-foot equipment shelter with integrated generator room, new utility rack with meter, a 1,000 gallon liquid propane tank, two 7-foot swing gates, an 8-foot security fence and gravel site surfacing would also be installed. Two antennas, two microwave dishes, and a lightning rod would be installed on the proposed tower. One receiving (RX) antenna and one transmission (TX) antenna would each be mounted on the tower at 182-feet. The two microwave dishes would be mounted at 160-feet and 182-feet, and the lightning rod would not exceed 199-feet. The total ground-disturbance is less than 0.25 acres. The tower and site construction and equipment acquisition and installation 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>

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:



