

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Spring Creek 115 kV Switching Station Construction Project  
Miller County, Georgia**

**RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE  
U.S. Department of Agriculture**

**Georgia Transmission Corporation  
Georgia 110**

**Prepared by:  
Engineering and Environmental Staff  
Rural Utilities Service**

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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) expects to receive a request for financial assistance from Georgia Transmission Corporation (Georgia Transmission) for the proposed Spring Creek 115 kV Switching Station Construction Project, which would involve the construction of a new four-breaker 115 kV switching station in Miller County, Georgia (the proposed Project). RUS may finance the proposed Project, thereby making it an action subject to review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and all applicable federal environmental laws and regulations. RUS determined that the proposed Project would require an Environmental Assessment (EA), in accordance with RUS's Environmental Policies and Procedures, 7 CFR Part 1794. RUS conducted an independent evaluation of the EA prepared by Georgia Transmission, concurred with its scope and content, and adopted it as the agency's EA, in accordance with 7 CFR § 1794.41. RUS has evaluated the proposed Project's purpose and need, reasonable alternatives, and potential impacts to the environment, and has concluded that the proposed Project will not have a significant impact on the human environment.

## **B. PURPOSE AND NEED**

Georgia Transmission is an electric transmission cooperative established under the laws of the State of Georgia in 1996. The not-for-profit cooperative, headquartered in Tucker, Georgia, is engaged in the business of building, maintaining, and owning electric power transmission facilities (transmission lines, substations, and switching stations) to serve 39 of the 42 Georgia Electric Membership Corporations (EMCs). Georgia Transmission provides transmission capacity to its members through participation in the Integrated Transmission System (ITS), the statewide transmission system jointly owned by Georgia Transmission, the Georgia Power Company, the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia, and the City of Dalton Utilities. The ITS serves as the backbone for the Georgia transmission grid, covering 17,500 miles of the Georgia's 18,500 miles of transmission lines.

Three Notch EMC, an EMC served by Georgia Transmission that provides service to Decatur, Early, Miller, Seminole, Clay and Baker Counties in southwestern Georgia, chronically receives some of the worst service from the ITS. Georgia Transmission determined that over a third of the sustained duration and frequency outages experienced in the Three Notch EMC service territory were attributed to the Blakely Primary-East Bainbridge 115 kV Transmission Line. This line was determined to be the primary source of Three Notch EMC's reliability issues, given that no other individual circuit or substation serving Three Notch EMC accounts for more than 18% of the outages. In addition to the service disruptions, Georgia Transmission's contingency study conducted to meet North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) standards, the *2010 South Regional Study*, identified threats that could result in overloading to the Blakely Primary-East Bainbridge 115 kV line under NERC contingency situations that could compromise the reliability of the transmission system.

### **C. PROPOSED ACTION**

The proposed Project involves the construction of a new four-breaker 115 kV switching station. A 3,500-foot field road will be improved and equipped with ditches and other drainage controls to serve as the access road to the switching station. Three (3) existing transmission facilities owned and operated by Georgia Power Company, including the Blakely Primary-East Bainbridge 115 kV Transmission Line and transmission line taps to the Colquitt and the West Donalsonville Substations, will be modified to support the construction of the switching station. Georgia Transmission is not requesting financial assistance for the modifications, which will be financed by another utility; therefore while the modifications are connected actions to the proposed Project they are not evaluated in this EA.

### **D. ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED**

#### Electrical Alternatives

The EA assessed three (3) electrical alternatives, including the no action alternative, an upgrading alternative, and a new construction alternative. Under the no action alternative, RUS would not provide financial assistance to Georgia Transmission, and therefore Georgia Transmission would not construct the proposed Project. The upgrading alternative would involve the reconductoring the North Camilla-Raccoon Creek 230 kV line to 1033 steel supported aluminum conductor in 2013 and upgrading three (3) overloaded 477 aluminum conductor steel-reinforced cable facilities (21.9 miles of 115 kV line) from 50°C to 100°C operation. The construction alternative (the proposed Project) would involve the construction of a new switching station. The proposed Project was selected as the preferred alternative. Under the no action alternative, Georgia Transmission would fail to fulfill its NERC obligations to ensure reliable electricity to its consumer members. Both the upgrading and construction alternatives would resolve the overloading issues identified in the contingency study; however, the construction alternative would provide the additional benefit of improving service to the Three Notch EMC service territory. The construction alternative was also identified as the least cost alternative.

#### Site Alternatives

Upon selection of the preferred electrical alternative, Georgia Transmission identified that the most desirable location for the switching station would be at the intersection of the Blakely Primary-East Bainbridge 115 kV line and two (2) other transmission facilities, the Colquitt and West Donalsonville Substation Taps. Construction at this location would meet the purpose and need by addressing the overloading and improving reliability to Three Notch EMC, while providing the added benefit of creating another network path on the system at the open point at the Donalsonville-West Donalsonville 115 kV line segment and alleviating the overloading on the Donalsonville Junction - East Bainbridge 115 kV line segment.

Two (2) sites were identified within the one (1) square mile centered at the intersection (the study area), both located north of the intersection between the Blakely and Colquitt Substation Tap lines. GTC considered potential electrical, construction, and community suitability, environmental, regulatory issues and mitigation, land acquisition requirements, and anticipated project cost in comparing the two sites. Though both of the sites were determined suitable for constructing the switching station, Site B, located immediately adjacent to the intersection, was selected as the preferred alternative. Due to its location, construction of the switching station on this site will not require the construction of new transmission line taps; construction of Site A would require new taps since it is located further from the intersection. Site B was also identified as the least cost alternative; it would have lower land acquisition and estimated total project costs.

## **E. SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

Construction of the proposed Project would require the disturbance of approximately 11.9-acres of land; 7.4-acres of disturbance for the construction of the switching station and 4.6-acres of disturbance for the construction of the access road (the proposed Project area). The EA determined that the proposed Project would have no significant impact, either directly, indirectly, or cumulatively, on land use, including formally classified lands and prime farmland, threatened and endangered species, floodplains, cultural resources, wetlands and waters of the U.S., transportation, noise, aesthetics, and environmental justice. Biological and cultural resources required field survey and consultation to determine effects, the details of which are included below.

An ecological field survey was conducted in June 2011 to determine the presence of protected species and wetlands and waters of the U.S. within the proposed Project area. The survey did not identify any federally-listed threatened and endangered species or federally designated critical habitat; however, one (1) active and four (4) abandoned gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows were identified. The gopher tortoise is a federal candidate species that is also a state-listed as threatened in Georgia. Candidate species do not receive statutory protection under the Endangered Species Act; however, federal agencies are encouraged to consider them in project planning. As a listed-species under Georgia state law, the gopher tortoise is protected under the Endangered Wildlife Act. Georgia Transmission has committed to educating contractors to be able to identify the protected species and establishing buffers around each active gopher tortoise burrow. Construction activities and equipment associated with these projects will be confined to areas outside of the buffers. Two (2) jurisdictional wetlands were delineated just beyond the proposed Project area; these will not be affected by the proposed Project. One (1) jurisdictional water, an intermittent stream was delineated within the proposed Project area, at the proposed location of the access road. Georgia Transmission intends to construct a new, longer culvert that will impact 71 feet of the stream; this activity

would qualify under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's Clean Water Act Nationwide Permit (NWP 3 and 12).

An archeological survey was completed in July 2011 that included literature review and field survey of shovel testing. Two (2) isolated finds and one (1) archeological site, a historic farmstead, were identified within the proposed Project's area of potential effects (APE). The isolates and farmstead were determined ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). A historic structure survey was completed in June 2010 as part of the preliminary environmental review of the potential alternative sites that identified seven (7) structures within the study area. None of the identified historic structures are eligible for listing on the NRHP. Based on the findings of the surveys, there are no archeological resources or historic buildings, structures, districts, and objects eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places within the proposed Project's area of potential effects. RUS has therefore determined that a finding of no historic properties affected is appropriate for the undertaking. The finding concludes RUS's responsibilities under the Section 106 of NHPA in accordance with the Programmatic Agreement (PA) executed by RUS, the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Georgia Transmission in October 2001 and extended in October 2012. The PA is included as an attachment to the EA.

#### **F. AGENCY AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The availability of the EA for public review was announced in the *Miller County Liberal* on November 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012. The EA was made publicly available electronically on the RUS Website, <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/UWP-EA.html>, and in hard copy at Georgia Transmission's headquarters office located at 2100 E. Exchange Place, Tucker, GA 30084, and at Miller County-James W. Merritt Jr. Memorial Library located at 259 E. Main Street, Colquitt, GA 39873. The thirty (30) day public comment period concluded on December 14, 2012, during which time no public or agency comments were received.

#### **G. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on its EA, RUS has concluded that the proposed Project would have no significant impacts to the human environment. RUS has concluded that the proposed Project is not likely to affect federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat. The proposed Project will have no adverse effect on historic properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Properties. Minority and low-income populations will not be adversely or disproportionately affected by this proposed Project.

In accordance with National Environmental Policy Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR §§ 1500-1508), and RUS's Environmental Policies and Procedures, as amended (7 CFR Part 1794), RUS has determined that the environmental impacts of the proposed Project have been adequately addressed and

that no significant impacts to the quality of the human environment would result from construction and operation of the proposed Project. Any final action by RUS related to the proposed Project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant federal and state environmental laws and regulations. RUS's action will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

#### **H. RUS LOAN REVIEW AND RIGHT OF ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW**

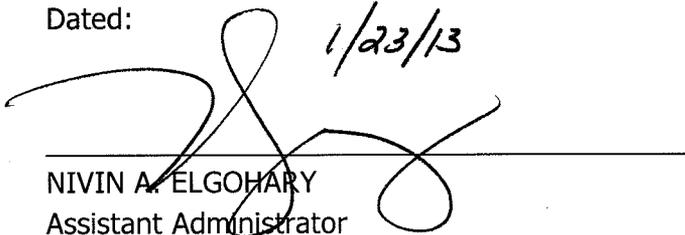
This FONSI is not a decision on Georgia Transmission's expected loan application and therefore not an approval of the expenditure of federal funds. Issuance of the FONSI and its notices concludes RUS's environmental review process in accordance with NEPA and RUS's Environmental Policies and Procedures. Final loan approval is dependent on the conclusion of the environmental review process in addition to financial and engineering review of the proposed Project. Issuance of the FONSI and publication of notices will allow for these reviews to proceed. There are no provisions to appeal this decision; legal challenges to the FONSI may be filed in federal district court under the Administrative Procedures Act.

#### **I. APPROVAL**

This Finding of No Significant Impact is effective on signature.

Dated:

1/23/13



NIVIN A. ELGOHARY  
Assistant Administrator  
Electric Programs  
Rural Utilities Service

#### **Contact Information**

For additional information on this FONSI and EA, please contact Ms. Emily Orler, Environmental Protection Specialist, at USDA, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Stop 1571, Washington DC 20250-1571, (202) 720-1414, or [emily.orler@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:emily.orler@wdc.usda.gov).