

§§ 1794.26–1794.29

(c) *Telecommunications and water and waste programs.* No groups or sets of proposed actions normally require the preparation of an EIS. The environmental review process, as described in this part, shall be used to identify those proposed actions for which the preparation of an EIS is necessary. If an EIS is required, RUS shall proceed directly to its preparation. Prior completion of an EA is not mandatory.

§§ 1794.26–1794.29 [Reserved]

Subpart D—Procedure for Categorical Exclusions

§ 1794.30 General.

The procedures of this subpart which apply to proposed actions classified as CEs in §§ 1794.21 and 1794.22 provide RUS with information necessary to determine if the proposed action meets the criteria for a CE. Where, because of extraordinary circumstances, a normally categorically excluded action may have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, RUS may require additional environmental documentation.

§ 1794.31 Classification.

(a) *Electric and telecommunications programs.* RUS will normally determine the proper environmental classification of projects based on its evaluation of the project description set forth in the construction work plan or loan design which the applicant is required to submit with its application for financial assistance. Each project must be sufficiently described to ensure its proper classification. RUS may require the applicant to provide additional information on a project where appropriate.

(b) *Water and waste program.* RUS will normally determine the proper environmental classification for projects based on its evaluation of the preliminary planning and design information.

§ 1794.32 Environmental report.

(a) For proposed actions listed in § 1794.21(b) and (c), the applicant is normally not required to submit an ER.

(b) For proposed actions listed in § 1794.22(a) and (b), the applicant shall normally submit an ER. Guidance in

7 CFR Ch. XVII (1–1–01 Edition)

preparing the ER for Electric and Telecommunication proposals is contained in RUS Bulletin 1794A–600. Guidance in preparing the ER for Water and Waste proposals is contained in RUS Bulletin 1794A–602. The applicant may be required to publish public notices and provide evidence of such if the proposed action is located in, impacts, or converts important land resources.

§ 1794.33 Agency action.

RUS may act on an application for financial assistance upon determining, based on the review of documents as set forth in § 1794.32 and such additional information as RUS deems necessary, that the project is categorically excluded.

§§ 1794.34–1794.39 [Reserved]

Subpart E—Procedure for Environmental Assessments

§ 1794.40 General.

This subpart applies to proposed actions described in § 1794.23. Where appropriate to carry out the purposes of NEPA, RUS may impose, on a case-by-case basis, additional requirements associated with the preparation of an EA. If at any point in the preparation of an EA, RUS determines that the proposed action will have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, the preparation of an EIS shall be required and the procedures in subpart G of this part shall be followed.

§ 1794.41 Document requirements.

Applicants will provide an ER in accordance with the appropriate guidance documents referenced in § 1794.7. After RUS has evaluated the ER and has determined the ER adequately addresses all applicable environmental issues, the ER will normally serve as RUS' EA. However, RUS reserves the right to prepare its own EA from the information provided in the ER. RUS will take responsibility for the scope and content of an EA.

§ 1794.42 Notice of availability.

Prior to RUS making a finding in accordance with § 1794.43 and upon RUS authorization and guidance, the applicant shall have a notice published

which announces the availability of the EA and solicits public comments on the EA.

§ 1794.43 Agency finding.

(a) *General.* If RUS finds, based on an EA that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, RUS will prepare a FONSI. Upon authorization of RUS, the applicant shall have a notice published which informs the public of the RUS finding and the availability of the EA and FONSI. The notice shall be prepared and published in accordance with RUS guidance.

(b) *Electric and telecommunications programs.* RUS shall have a notice published in the FEDERAL REGISTER that announces the availability of the EA and FONSI.

§ 1794.44 Timing of agency action.

RUS may take its final action on proposed actions requiring an EA (§1794.23) at any time after publication of the RUS and applicant notices that a FONSI has been made and any required review period has expired. When substantive comments are received on the EA, RUS may provide an additional period (15 days) for public review following the publication of its FONSI determination. Final action shall not be taken until this review period has expired.

§§ 1794.45–1794.49 [Reserved]

Subpart F—Procedure for Environmental Assessments With Scoping

§ 1794.50 Normal sequence.

For proposed actions covered by §1794.24 and other actions determined by the Administrator to require an EA with Scoping, RUS and the applicant will follow the same procedures for scoping and the requirements for notices and documents as for proposed actions normally requiring an EIS through the point at which the Environmental Analysis (EVAL) is submitted (see §1794.54). After the EVAL has been submitted, RUS will make a judgment to utilize the EVAL as its EA and issue a FONSI or prepare an EIS.

§ 1794.51 Preparation for scoping.

(a) As soon as practicable after RUS and the applicant have developed a schedule for the environmental review process, RUS shall have its notice of intent to prepare an EA or EIS (§1794.13) published in the FEDERAL REGISTER (see 40 CFR 1508.22). The applicant shall have published, in a timely manner, a notice similar to RUS' notice.

(b) As part of the early planning, the applicant should consult with appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies to inform them of the proposed action, identify permits and approvals which must be obtained, and administrative procedures which must be followed.

(c) Before formal scoping is initiated, RUS will require the applicant to submit an Alternative Evaluation Study and either a Siting Study (generation) or a Macro-Corridor Study (transmission lines).

(d) The applicant is encouraged to hold public information meetings in the general location of the proposed action and any reasonable alternatives when such applicant meetings will make the scoping process more meaningful. A written summary of the comments made at such meetings must be submitted to RUS as soon as practicable after the meetings.

§ 1794.52 Scoping meetings.

(a) Both RUS and the applicant shall have a notice published which announces a public scoping meeting is to be conducted, either in conjunction with the notice of intent or as a separate notice.

(b) The RUS notice shall be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER at least 14 days prior to the meeting(s). The applicant's notice shall be published in a newspaper at least 10 days prior to the meeting(s). Other forms of media may also be used by the applicant to notice the meetings.

(c) Where an environmental document is the subject of the hearing or meeting, that document will be made available to the public at least 10 days in advance of the meeting.

(d) The scoping meeting(s) will be held in the area of the proposed action at such place(s) as RUS determines will