

Rural Utilities Service, USDA

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§ 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.

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.

[63 FR 68655, Dec. 11, 1998, as amended at 68 FR 45159, Aug. 1, 2003]

§§ 1794.34–1794.39 [Reserved]

§ 1794.44 Timing of agency action.

Subpart E—Procedure for Environmental Assessments

RUS may take its final action on proposed actions requiring an EA (§1794.23) at any time after publication of 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.

[68 FR 45159, Aug. 1, 2003]

§ 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.

§§ 1794.45–1794.49 [Reserved]

Subpart F—Procedure for Environmental Assessments With Scoping

§ 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.

§ 1794.50 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 where project scoping has been completed. Following project scoping, RUS will make a judgment to have an EA prepared or contract for the preparation of an EIS.

[68 FR 45159, Aug. 1, 2003]

§ 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.

§ 1794.51 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 and schedule scoping meetings (§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.

§ 1794.43 Agency finding.

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,

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(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.

[63 FR 68655, Dec. 11, 1998, as amended at 68 FR 45160, Aug. 1, 2003]

§ 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 best afford an opportunity for public involvement. Any person or representative of an organization, or government body desiring to make a statement at the meeting may make such statement in writing or orally. The format of the meeting may be one of two styles. It can either be of the traditional style which features formal presentations

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followed by a comment period, or the open house style in which attendees are able to individually obtain information on topics or issues of interest within an established time period. The applicant or its consultant shall prepare a record of the scoping meeting. The record shall consist of a transcript when a traditional meeting format is used or a summary report when an open house format is used.

(e) As soon as practicable after the scoping meeting(s), RUS, as lead agency, shall determine the significant issues to be analyzed in depth and identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review. RUS will develop a proposed scope for further environmental study and review. RUS shall send a copy of this proposed scope to cooperating agencies and the applicant, and allow recipients 30 days to comment on the scope's adequacy and emphasis. After expiration of the 30-day period, RUS shall provide written guidance to the applicant concerning the scope of environmental study to be performed and information to be gathered.

[63 FR 68655, Dec. 11, 1998, as amended at 68 FR 45160, Aug. 1, 2003]

§ 1794.53 Environmental report.

(a) After scoping procedures have been completed, RUS shall require the applicant to develop and submit an ER. The ER shall be prepared under the supervision and guidance of RUS staff and RUS shall evaluate and be responsible for the accuracy of all information contained therein.

(b) The applicant's ER will normally serve as the RUS EA. After RUS has reviewed and found the ER to be satisfactory, the applicant shall provide RUS with a sufficient number of copies of the ER to satisfy the RUS distribution plan.

(c) The ER shall include a summary of the construction and operation monitoring and mitigation measures for the proposed action. These measures