

call (866) 632-9992, submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: *Mail:* U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC 20250-9410; *Fax:* (202) 690-7442; or, *email:* program.intake@usda.gov. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Dated: March 3, 2016.

Tony Hernandez,

Administrator, Housing and Community Facilities Programs.

[FR Doc. 2016-05610 Filed 3-11-16; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-XV-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Telecommunications Program: Notice of Availability of a Programmatic Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Availability of a Programmatic Environmental Assessment of USDA Rural Utilities Service's Financial Support for Deployment of the Telecommunications Programs to Rural America.

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS, Agency), an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, issued a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the development of a more efficient and effective environmental review process for the RUS Telecommunications Program on March 1, 2016. The Notice of Availability of a Programmatic Environmental Assessment was published on March 2, 2016, in the *Federal Register* at 81 FR 10575. The PEA provides a broad environmental analysis of the Agency's preliminary decisions and includes a tiered, site-specific analysis at the project level that would be completed before Agency dispersal of funds and/or applicant construction. Since publication of the Agency's Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR part 1970) in the *Federal Register* (81 FR 11000) on March 2, 2016, RUS has updated the PEA with citations to the Agency's new environmental rule. These changes are administrative and not substantive, therefore supplementation of the PEA is not required.

DATES: Written comments on the PEA must be received on or before March 31, 2016.

ADDRESSES: Please submit written comments by physical mail or electronic mail to: Mr. Richard Fristik, Senior

Environmental Protection Specialist, Water and Environmental Programs/Engineering and Environmental Staff, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Mail Stop 1571, Room 2240, Washington, DC 20250, *fax:* (202) 690-0649, or *email:* Richard.Fristik@wdc.usda.gov.

To obtain copies of the PEA or for further information, contact: Mr. Richard Fristik at the contact information provided in this Notice. A copy of the PEA is available for downloading through the Rural Development homepage at: <http://www.rd.usda.gov/publications/environmental-studies/assessments/programmatic-environmental-assessment>. Additional information about the Agency and its programs is available on the Internet at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information on the PEA, please contact Mr. Richard Fristik, Senior Environmental Protection Specialist, Water and Environmental Programs/Engineering and Environmental Staff, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Mail Stop 1571, Room 2240, Washington, DC 20250, *telephone:* (202) 720-5093, *fax:* (202) 690-0649, or *email:* Richard.Fristik@wdc.usda.gov. Parties wishing to be placed on the PEA's mailing list for future information and to receive copies of the PEA should also contact Mr. Fristik.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: RUS issued a PEA for the development of a more efficient and effective environmental review process for its Telecommunications Program on March 1, 2016. The PEA provides a broad environmental analysis of the Agency's preliminary decisions and includes a tiered, site-specific analysis at the project level that would be completed before Agency dispersal of funds and/or applicant construction. Since publication of the Agency's Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR part 1970) on March 2, 2016, RUS has updated the PEA with citations to the Agency's new environmental rule. These changes are administrative and not substantive, therefore supplementation of the PEA is not required.

The RUS Telecommunications Program provides a variety of loans and grants to build and expand broadband networks in rural America. Loans to build broadband networks and deliver service to households and businesses in rural communities provide a necessary source of capital for rural telecommunications companies. Grant

funding is awarded based on a number of factors relating to the benefits to be derived from the proposed broadband network project, as specified in applicable program regulations.

Eligible applicants for RUS loans and grants include for-profit and non-profit entities, tribes, municipalities, and cooperatives. The Agency particularly encourages investment in tribal and economically disadvantaged areas. Through low-cost funding for telecommunications infrastructure, rural residents can have access to services that will close the digital divide between rural and urban communities. Once funds are awarded, RUS monitors the projects to make sure they are completed in accordance with program conditions and requirements.

The application process for requesting financial assistance for the various Telecommunications programs varies slightly from a competitive grant program, individual project proposals, or multi-year "loan design" applications. The Agency seeks to synchronize and create environmental review efficiencies for future project-level environmental review compliance for the various programs, commensurate with the potential environmental impacts. The Agency also seeks to establish proper sequencing of certain agency preliminary decisions (*i.e.*, obligation of funds and/or approval of interim financing requests) with subsequent tiered, site-specific project environmental reviews.

The PEA is intended to expedite the funding, deployment, and expansion of broadband infrastructure in rural America. The PEA includes detailed descriptions and analyses of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts associated with broadband infrastructure technologies and construction methods, such as impacts to water resources, terrestrial resources, historic and cultural resources, air and climate resources, noise, threatened and endangered species, electromagnetic radiation, and Environmental Justice issues. Use of the PEA analyses thereby saves project-level processing time, ensuring consistent and accurate environmental evaluations while avoiding unnecessary duplication and repetition in project-level planning and evaluation. Use of the PEA enables project-level compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other requirements to focus on the remaining relevant site-specific issues, expediting planning, analysis, compliance,

documentation, and ultimately project-level decisions.

The PEA is available for public review at the digital and physical addresses provided in this Notice. Questions and comments should be sent to RUS at the mailing or email addresses provided in this Notice. RUS should receive written comments on the PEA on or before March 31, 2016 to ensure that they are considered in its environmental impact determination.

Any final action by RUS related to the broadband portion of the RUS Telecommunications Program will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant presidential executive orders and federal, state, and local environmental laws and regulations in addition to the completion of the environmental review requirements as prescribed in the Agency's Environmental Policies and Procedures.

Dated: March 7, 2016.

Keith B. Adams,

*Assistant Administrator—
Telecommunications Program, Rural Utilities Service.*

[FR Doc. 2016-05584 Filed 3-11-16; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Information Collection Activity; Comment Request

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35, as amended), the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) invites comments on this information collection for which RUS intends to request approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by May 13, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Thomas P. Dickson, Acting Director, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., STOP 1522, Room 5164—South Building, Washington, DC 20250-1522. Telephone: (202) 690-4492. FAX: (202) 720-8435. Email: thomas.dickson@wdc.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) regulation (5 CFR part 1320) implementing provisions of the

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) requires that interested members of the public and affected agencies have an opportunity to comment on information collection and recordkeeping activities (see 5 CFR 1320.8(d)). This notice identifies an information collection that RUS is submitting to OMB for extension.

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to: Thomas P. Dickson, Acting Director, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, USDA Rural Utilities Service, STOP 1522, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Washington, DC 20250-1522. FAX: (202) 720-8435. Email: thomas.dickson@wdc.usda.gov.

Title: 7 CFR 1779, Water and Waste Disposal Programs Guaranteed Loans.
OMB Number: 0572-0122.

Type of Request: Extension of a currently approved information collection.

Abstract: The Rural Utilities Service is authorized by Section 306 of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1926) to make loans to public agencies, nonprofit corporations, and Indian tribes for the development of water and waste disposal facilities primarily servicing rural residents. The guaranteed loan program encourages lender participation and provides specific guidance in the processing and servicing of guaranteed loans. The regulations governing the Water and Waste Disposal Guaranteed Loan program are codified at 7 CFR 1779. The required information, in the form of written documentation and Agency approved forms, is collected from applicants/borrowers, their lenders, and consultants. The collected information will be used to determine applicant/borrower eligibility, project feasibility, and to ensure borrowers operate on a sound basis and use loan funds for authorized purposes. Failure to collect proper information could result in improper determinations of

eligibility, improper use of funds, and/or unsound loans.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 7.8 hours per response.

Respondents: Business or other for profit; Not-for-profit institutions; State, Local or Tribal government.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 15.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 7.3.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 858 hours.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from MaryPat Daskal, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, at (202) 720-0992. FAX: (202) 720-8435. Email: marypat.daskal@wdc.usda.gov. All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Dated: March 4, 2016.

Brandon McBride,

Administrator, Rural Utilities Service.

[FR Doc. 2016-05585 Filed 3-11-16; 8:45 am]

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ARCTIC RESEARCH COMMISSION

Notice of 105th Commission Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the U.S. Arctic Research Commission will hold its 105th meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska, on March 16, 2016. The business session, open to the public, will convene at 8:30 a.m.

The agenda items include:

- (1) Call to order and approval of the agenda
- (2) Approval of the minutes from the 104th meeting
- (3) Commissioners and staff reports

The focus of the meeting will be a discussion of Arctic research activities and events.

If you plan to attend this meeting, please notify us via the contact information below. Any person planning to attend who requires special accessibility features and/or auxiliary aids, such as sign language interpreters, must inform the Commission of those needs in advance of the meeting.

Contact person for further information: John Farrell, Executive Director, U.S. Arctic Research Commission, 703-525-0111 or TDD 703-306-0090.

Kathy Farrow,

Communications Specialist.

[FR Doc. 2016-04559 Filed 3-11-16; 8:45 am]

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