

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Development

Florida Renewable Partners (FRP): Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact.

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to a request for possible financing assistance to Florida Renewable Partners (FRP) for the proposed Columbia County Solar Project (Project) in Columbia County, Florida.

FURTHER INFORMATION: To obtain copies of the EA and FONSI, or for further information, contact: Robert Deems, Environmental Protection Specialist, USDA Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service via email Robert.Deems@usda.gov. The EA and FONSI are also available for public review at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessment/florida-renewable-partners-columbia-county-solar>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed project consists of the construction of a new solar farm that will generate 74.5 megawatts (MWs) of clean, renewable electricity, and to provide reliable, low cost, renewable electricity to rural electric customers. The electricity generated onsite will be delivered to the offsite electrical grid via a 230–kilovolt (kV) overhead interconnection to the Duke Energy Florida (DEF) transmission system.

Alternatives considered by RUS and FRP included the No action and Action alternative. The alternatives are discussed in the Florida Renewable Partners Columbia County Solar EA. The RUS has reviewed and approved the EA for the proposed project.

The availability of the EA for public review was announced via notice in the South Alabamian on February 14, 15, and 16, 2023. The 14-day comment period ended on February 28, 2023, with no comments received. The EA was available for public review via the USDA Rural Development website.

Based on its EA, commitments made by FRP, and public comments received, RUS has concluded that the project would have no significant impact to water quality, wetlands, floodplains, land use, aesthetics, transportation, or human health and safety.

The proposed project will have no adverse effect on resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Agency has also concluded that the proposed project is not likely to affect federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical

habitat thereof. The proposed project would not disproportionately affect minority and/or low-income populations.

No other potential significant impacts resulting from the proposed project have been identified. Therefore, RUS has determined that this FONSI fulfills its obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR §§ 1500-1508), and USDA Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) for its action related to the project.

RUS is satisfied that the environmental impacts of the proposed project have been adequately addressed. RUS' federal action would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, and as such it will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its action related to the proposed project.

Dated: July 19, 2023