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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

STATE ROUTE 15 (US 64) BETWEEN SAVANNAH AND WAYNESBORO - SECTION 26A APPROVAL FOR
STREAM ALTERATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH WIDENING OF 6.079 MILES IN HARDIN COUNTY, TENNESSEE

On February 20, 2004, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) issued a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) for a 2.73-mile section of the proposed state route (SR) 15 roadway improvement project and adopted a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)/Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) Environmental Assessment (EA) dated August 3, 2000. TVA issued a Section 26a (of the TVA Act) permit approval for the 2.73-mile section. The FHWA/TDOT EA assessed the impacts of highway construction along a 23.36-mile corridor between Savannah in Hardin County, Tennessee, and the western terminus of the Waynesboro Bypass in Wayne County, Tennessee; the 2.73-mile section was part of the corridor. Since 2004, TVA has evaluated and issued 26a permits for three more sections of the 23.36-mile corridor project.

TDOT recently submitted an application for a Section 26a permit for stream alterations associated with the construction of a 6.079-mile section of the SR 15 corridor improvement project (Attachment 1). The stream alterations include encapsulations; relocations; and stream loss, intake/outfall structures, spring boxes, riprap, bridge replacement, and wetland fill affecting Rocky Branch, Wilson Branch, Boon Creek, Bigbee Branch, Smith Fork Creek, and their associated unnamed tributaries. The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a four-lane roadway from Firetower Road to Baptist Loop Road in Hardin County. The new facility would provide a safer level of traffic service for the motoring public.

The proposed action is the subject of an environmental assessment (EA) prepared by FHWA and TDOT in 2000. Due to length of time since FHWA issued its FONSI, FHWA re-evaluated its original EA in July 2012. FHWA determined that the proposed project was properly evaluated under the 2000 EA (Attachment 2). The EA is incorporated by reference. TVA has independently reviewed the FHWA/TDOT EA and re-evaluation and found it to be adequate. TVA is therefore adopting that EA.

TVA has two alternatives regarding the latest proposed highway improvements of SR 15 in Hardin County. Under the No Action Alternative, TVA would not issue the Section 26a approval necessary for the widening of SR 15 in this 6.079-mile section, and TDOT's project needs would not be met. Under the Proposed Action Alternative, TVA would issue the Section 26a approval. TDOT would make the necessary improvements to SR 15, including the stream alterations, to widen this 6.079-mile section in Hardin County. TVA's preferred alternative is the Proposed Action Alternative.

TDOT proposes to mitigate impacts both to streams and to the surrounding wetlands. To address the stream encapsulation and length losses, TDOT proposes a combination of on-site restoration and the payment of \$866,640 to the Tennessee In-Lieu Fee Stream Mitigation Program. The proposed on-site restoration for 2,870 feet of stream impacts includes in-kind replacement and the planting of two rows of trees on both sides of the new channel, where possible, as shown in the tree planting plan or permit sketches (Attachment 1). For wetlands, TDOT proposes to mitigate the 3.84-acre wetland loss at a 2:1 ratio, 7.61 acres, from available

wetland credits in the Lower Tennessee watershed at a cost of \$280,000. The proposed project is located in the Smith Fork Creek Watershed, and no unique or important aquatic communities occur in the affected stream segments. There would thus be no significant impacts to streams, wetlands, or water quality given the compensatory mitigation described above and TDOT's obligation to adhere to (1) its own best management practices; (2) TVA's standard Section 26a permit conditions; and (3) the conditions of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Section 401 Certification and Aquatic Resources Alternation permits.

TDOT previously conducted acoustic and mist net surveys along the proposed segment area for presence of the endangered Indiana bat in 2010 and 2012. The 2012 survey results were negative for the Indiana bat; therefore, the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect the Indiana bat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with TDOT's determination on August 28, 2012 (Attachment 3).

The proposed segment utilizes alignments analyzed in the FHWA/TDOT EA. As stated in the TDOT applications and supporting materials, they comply with the National Flood Insurance Regulations and are consistent with Executive Order 11988 on floodplain management. As stated in the FHWA/TDOT 2000 EA, the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Officer has determined that the proposed action would not affect historic properties. TVA has identified that all other potential impacts within the 6.079-mile section of SR 15 were assessed in the adopted FHWA/TDOT EA (August 2000) and would be insignificant.

Mitigation and Special Permit Conditions

TVA would require that TDOT adhere to standard conditions for water quality protection contained in the Section 26a permit. As described above, TDOT proposes to mitigate impacts to streams through onsite restoration activities and the payment of \$866,640 to the Tennessee Stream Mitigation Program. TDOT also proposes to mitigate impacts to wetlands by purchasing 8 credits into wetland banking to the Tennessee Mitigation Fund at a cost of \$280,000. TDOT shall be required to provide TVA with suitable documentation as determined by TVA of these mitigation purchases and payments prior to commencing work in the streams and wetlands to be impacted. TVA has not identified the need for other mitigation to further reduce potential impacts.

Conclusion and Findings

Based on the findings listed above and the analyses in the EA, TVA concludes that the proposed action of issuing a Section 26a permit for the 6.079-mile segment of the proposed highway project would not be a major federal action significantly affecting the environment. Accordingly, an environmental impact statement is not required. This FONSI is contingent upon TDOT's completion of the above-described mitigation measures and adherence to the above-described best management practices and permit conditions.



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Date Signed