

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY**  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROPOSAL FOR THE  
ATHENS MCMINN INNOVATION PARK  
MCMINN COUNTY, TENNESSEE (ATHENS)  
EAXX-455-00-000-1737714574

An integral part of Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) mission is to promote economic development within the TVA service area. TVA provides financial assistance to help bring to market new or improved sites and facilities within the TVA service area and positions communities to compete successfully for new jobs and capital investment. TVA proposes to provide an economic development grant through InvestPrep funds to the McMinn County Economic Development Authority (MCEDA) to assist with the development of a portion of the Athens McMinn Innovation Park (AMIP) in McMinn County, Tennessee. The area of TVA's Proposed Action (herein referred to as the Project Area) encompasses 78.3 acres of open grassy land and disjunct forested areas located adjacent to Interstate 75 (I-75), Denso Road, Lee Irwin Road (County Road 171), and Private Brand Way, in Athens, Tennessee.

The proposal is the subject of an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by TVA, which is incorporated herein by reference. In the EA, TVA evaluated potential impacts of the Proposed Action (i.e., the Action Alternative) as well as the alternative of not implementing the action (i.e., the No Action Alternative). Under the No Action Alternative, TVA would not provide InvestPrep funds to the MCEDA. TVA would not be furthering its mission of promoting economic development by assisting the local community to compete successfully for new jobs and capital investment through the Proposed Action. The MCEDA may seek alternate funding (if available) to combine with their existing funds to develop the site. Under the No Action Alternative, success in obtaining alternate funding would result in similar impacts and benefits as the Action Alternative. In the event the Project was postponed, any effects would be delayed for the duration of the postponement. If the MCEDA were not able to secure the funding for the Proposed Action, the site would likely remain unchanged, no environmental impacts would be anticipated, and the economic benefits associated with the Action Alternative would not be accomplished.

Under the Action Alternative, TVA would provide InvestPrep funds to the MCEDA, to be matched with non-TVA funds to facilitate the development of a portion of the Athens McMinn Innovation Park. TVA funds for the 78.3-acre Project Area would be used for clearing 12.6 acres of trees. Felled trees would be cut and burned on site. Stumps would be removed and burned on site. A new industrial access road, extending approximately 2,500 feet, would be constructed beginning at the cul-de-sac on Private Brand Way at the southernmost point of the Project Area and ending at a new cul-de-sac in the Project Area. The road would be paved with two lanes and have graveled shoulders. No borrow material from off-site sources would be needed. Following the site improvements, the disturbed areas would be stabilized with seed and mulch. Activities required for the Action Alternative would occur over approximately nine months and would require a small workforce that would most likely be assigned from a local contractor.

TVA's preferred alternative is the Proposed Action Alternative. This alternative would meet the purpose of the Project and would further TVA's mission to promote economic development in the TVA service area.

The potential impacts of the Action Alternative are described in detail in the EA. Implementation of the Action Alternative would have no impact on solid and hazardous waste, land use, prime farmland, managed and natural areas, and recreation.

Resources that could potentially be impacted (negatively or positively) by implementing the Action Alternative include air quality and climate change, groundwater, soils, surface water, floodplains, wetlands, aquatic zoology, terrestrial zoology, and botany. Implementation of the Action Alternative could create potential impacts on the human environment, including cultural resources, visual effects, noise, socioeconomics, and transportation issues.

Construction-related activities, including the burning of trees and stumps, would result in minor and short-term impacts on air quality and climate change. With the use of best management practices (BMPs), impacts would be minimal, temporary, and localized; and would not be anticipated to result in any violation of applicable ambient air quality standards, impact regional air quality, or affect nearby persons.

Near-surface grading activities would not intersect with a water supply aquifer in the area, and effects to groundwater would be minor. Soils disturbed by grading would be stabilized after construction, thereby preventing erosion and sedimentation. It is not anticipated that construction activities would encounter hazardous substances during Proposed Actions.

Soils would be disturbed by the Proposed Action including tree clearing, tree and stump burning, and grading for the construction of a paved two-lane industrial access road. Stabilization of disturbed soils following grading to sufficiently reduce sedimentation would be accomplished by the implementation of erosion control measures in accordance with a project-specific construction general permit/stormwater pollution prevention plan. BMPs would be used during site development to avoid contamination of surface water in the Project Area. These factors would effectively avoid or minimize impacts on soils and from soil erosion.

The Project Area would be outside of mapped floodplains; however, two perennial streams were identified in the aquatics field survey: Guthrie Branch (S001) and a stream draining to Webb Lake (S006). The State of Tennessee regulates floodplains of unmapped streams; therefore, floodplain regulations would apply to S001 and S006. S001 will be avoided and a buffer of 24 feet on either side would be maintained to protect its unmapped floodplain. The road would cross the floodplain of S006. To minimize adverse impacts, the road would be constructed such that upstream flood elevations would not be increased by more than 1.0 foot. Therefore, there could be minor direct impacts on floodplains and their natural and beneficial values. Both direct and indirect impacts would be minimized by using standard BMPs during construction.

The Action Alternative could affect six streams and four wetlands by tree clearing, grading, fill placement for the access road, and or site stabilization. One stream and one wetland would be avoided. Direct and unavoidable impacts to regulated waters, if required, would be coordinated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation

with permitting and any associated compensatory mitigation to ensure impacts would not be significant. Erosion control measures would be implemented, in accordance with a project-specific construction general permit/stormwater pollution prevention plan, to sufficiently reduce sedimentation. These efforts would ensure that this TVA-funded Proposed Action would be compliant with the Clean Water Act (CWA) Sections 401 and 404 and Executive Order 11990.

Perennial stream S006 provides suitable habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrate species. Generalist fish species such as mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) and sunfish (*Lepomis* spp.), although not observed, could also potentially occur in S006. No open waters/ponds were identified in the Project Area. Common aquatic species could be impacted in S006, but impacts would be minor. No rare, threatened, or endangered aquatic species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or habitat suitable for listed aquatic species occur in the Project Area.

The Proposed Action would not be likely to affect populations of wildlife species common to the area, as the amount of habitat to be removed is relatively small, of lower quality, and similar herbaceous habitats and forested fragments exist in the surrounding landscape. Under Section 7 of the ESA, the Proposed Action would not jeopardize the continued existence of whooping crane due to lack of available migration or overwintering habitat in the Project Area. Grading could impact monarch butterfly foraging habitat; however, significant impacts would not be anticipated as these impacts would be expected to be minor due to the small quantity of habitat potentially present in the Project Area. The Proposed Action would not jeopardize the continued existence of the monarch butterfly. McMinn County, Tennessee, is no longer within the rusty-patched bumblebee's range. The Project Action would have no effect on this species as it is not believed to exist in the Project Area.

No caves or other hibernacula for the gray bat or tricolored bat exist in the project footprint or would be impacted by the Proposed Action. Approximately 2.5 acres of suitable summer roosting habitat for tricolored bat is proposed for removal as part of proposed activities. McMinn County, Tennessee, is considered within the range where tricolored bats hibernate. TVA recommends removing suitable habitat outside of pup season (May 15 – July 31), when juvenile bats are unable to escape from trees in the event they are present in trees identified for removal.

Based on the scale of the Proposed Action and amount of suitable available habitat, the Action Alternative would not jeopardize the continued existence of tricolored bat. The Action Alternative would have no effect on gray bats.

Impacts on common plant species removed or disturbed would be minor and insignificant. Approximately 12.6 acres of trees would be cleared in the Project Area. No habitat for uncommon or rare plant communities is present within the Project Area or would be affected by the Proposed Action. No state or federally listed plants were observed in the Project Area during the January 2025 field survey, and the Project Area lacked suitable habitat for the white fringeless orchid due to the significant amount of past human disturbance. No designated critical habitat for plants occurs in the Project Area.

Given that there are no known historic structures within the Project Area and that the Proposed Actions would not involve the construction of above-ground resources, no historic architectural resources would be impacted by the project, directly or visually. Tennessee Valley Archaeological

Research (TVAR) completed a Phase I survey for cultural resources, both archaeological and architectural components, for the AMIP including portions of the Project Area in March and April 2015. TVAR did not identify any cultural resources and recommended no additional surveys. Stantec completed a Phase I archaeological survey of the APE in 2025. All but one shovel test sites were negative for cultural material. Isolated Find 1 consisted of one Jack's Reef Pentagonal projectile point/knife. The Phase I archaeological survey did not identify any archaeological sites in the APE and there was no evidence of intact, buried deposits surrounding the single isolated find. Stantec recommended no further archaeological work within the APE. TVA received concurrence from the Tennessee Historical Commission in correspondence dated February 12, 2025, with the report's findings (see Attachment 2 in EA). No objections were received from the consulted Tribes.

Construction vehicles and equipment visible during grading activities would have a minor visual impact over the temporary construction period as well as minor permanent impact due to rough grading. This change would be minor given the brief period that drivers would be in the area. Implementation of the Action Alternative would result in a minor decrease in visual quality for residents in the viewshed.

Construction noise would be localized and temporary, and no receptor would be exposed to significant noise levels for an extended period. Further, construction activities would be expected to be conducted during daylight hours, when ambient noise levels are often higher, and most individuals are less sensitive to noise. It is anticipated that sound levels would not exceed 85 decibels at the Project Area boundary per Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards. Thus, noise-related impacts resulting from the implementation of the Action Alternative are anticipated to be temporary and minor.

Minor beneficial socioeconomic impacts during the construction of the Proposed Action would occur. No long-term impacts on community services are anticipated and there would be no impacts on low-income communities in the area.

Additional traffic would be generated during construction activities. However, the amount of additional traffic generated would be temporary, minor, and have a negligible impact on overall traffic volumes.

### **Mitigation**

To minimize or reduce the environmental effects of site activities associated with the Action Alternative, the MCEDA, or its contractors, would ensure all grading activities conducted would be in compliance with stormwater permitting requirements and use applicable BMPs to minimize and control erosion and fugitive dust during these actions and the new road would be constructed such that upstream flood elevations in unmapped stream S006 would not be increased by more than 1.0 foot. Stream S001 would be avoided and a buffer of 24 feet on either side would be maintained to protect its unmapped floodplain.

Operations involving chemical or fuel storage or resupply and vehicle servicing would be handled outside of riparian areas and in such a manner as to prevent these items from reaching a watercourse. Earthen berms or other effective means would be installed to protect nearby stream channels from direct surface runoff. Servicing of equipment and vehicles is expected to be done

with care to avoid leakage, spillage, and subsequent surface or groundwater contamination. Oil waste, filters, and other litter would be collected and disposed of properly.

**Conclusion and Findings**

Based on the findings listed above and the analyses in the EA, we conclude that the Proposed Action of TVA funding to assist with the development of a portion of the Athens McMinn Innovation Park would not be a major federal action significantly affecting the environment. This finding is dependent on the implementation of the mitigation measures described above. Accordingly, an environmental impact statement is not required.



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Date Signed