

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY
ROCK ISLAND STATE PARK RECREATION EASEMENT
WARREN AND WHITE COUNTY, TENNESSEE

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has received a request by Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) for an easement allowing their continued management of Rock Island State Park. TDEC’s proposal would add new developed recreation opportunities within the state park and improve access to park facilities.

TDEC has requested a 40-year term recreation easement over 367 acres of TVA-managed public lands for the purposes of public recreation, including up to 5 acres for commercial recreation. Since 1971, the lands have been managed by TDEC in conjunction with its management of the adjacent Rock Island State Park. The land is located on Great Falls Reservoir, and along the Caney Fork River and Collins River in Warren and White Counties, Tennessee.

There are three main aspects of the proposal:

- Establishing a 40-year public and commercial recreation easement allowing management of the TVA lands by TDEC, including maintenance actions on existing facilities;
- Restoration and use of an historic mill for a mixed use restaurant, meeting space, and inn as well as making associated access improvements (e.g., parking), which together occupy a five acre area; and
- Issuing a separate permanent easement to the State of Tennessee allowing the Department of Transportation (TDOT) to reroute a portion of the state highway (SR 287) away from the historic mill location to provide better public safety, for better development of the property, and to improve access.

The 40-year agreement would provide an easement for public recreation purposes in the area, with the exception of the 5-acre area at the historic mill, which would be for commercial recreation purposes.

Alternatives

The proposed action is the subject of an environmental assessment (EA) prepared by TVA. The EA addresses two alternatives. Under the No Action Alternative, the area would continue to be managed by TDEC under an existing license agreement. The same or a similar level of public recreation opportunities would continue for all existing facilities within the licensed area, as stated within the existing license agreement. There would be no renovation or maintenance of the historic mill and associated development. The highway segment would remain in its current alignment.

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, TVA would enter into a 40-year agreement with TDEC to manage 367-acres of TVA-managed public lands in conjunction with TDEC's management of the Rock Island State Park. Under the agreement, TDEC would manage the TVA lands and be responsible for maintenance actions on existing facilities. TVA would permit TDEC to restore the historic Great Falls Cotton Mill for use as a commercial facility and access improvements at the mill site would be implemented (e.g., parking area, sidewalks). The agreement would allow for commercial recreation within five-acres surrounding the mill location. In addition, a segment of the state highway would be relocated to move the highway away from the historic mill location for better development of the property and to improve safety for drivers and for pedestrians visiting the area. The state highway proposal would affect approximately 12 acres of vegetated lands just south of the mill location and would require TVA to issue a separate permanent road easement to the State of Tennessee. This alternative is preferred by TVA.

Impacts Assessment

TVA conducted a preliminary internal review by a network of designated environmental specialists. Based on this internal review, TVA determined that the following resources could be potentially affected by the proposed action and are addressed in this EA.

- Archaeological and Historical Resources
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Terrestrial Ecology
- Floodplains
- Recreation
- Noise Impacts
- Visual Impacts
- Transportation
- Socioeconomic Impacts

TVA determined that the proposed action would have no or negligible impacts related to aquatic ecology, wetlands, solid and hazardous waste, prime farmland, air quality, and climate change.

TVA has determined the proposed undertaking would not adversely affect the Collins River Bridge, the Great Falls Hydroelectric Station or the Great Falls Cotton Mill. TVA finds that in

order to avoid adverse effects to the Mill, the proposed undertaking should be consistent with the Secretary's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (NPS 2017) and that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOA) would be executed to detail the proposed treatment plan for the building rehabilitation. TVA finds that 40WR125 is eligible for listing on the NRHP under Criterion D on its own merits in association with both the mill and dam occupants. Sites may be eligible for listing on the NRHP under Criteria D when the site has yielded, or may be likely to yield, important information in prehistory or history. In addition, 40WR125 is eligible as a contributing element to both the NRHP-listed Great Falls Cotton Mill (WR-138) and the NRHP-listed Great Falls Dam (WR-140). The cultural analysis also evaluated and assessed the effects on two early nineteenth-century cemeteries which were within the area of potential effects. One is named Cunningham Cemetery, with five internments, and the other is an unnamed cemetery (40WR117) that contains approximately 12 marked grave locations.

TVA has consulted with the TN SHPO regarding these findings and determinations. On February 12, 2018, the TN SHPO concurred with TVA's findings that as proposed, the undertaking will adversely affect the National Register eligible site of 40WR125. Additionally, TVA reinitiated consultation after TDOT proposed an alignment shift and to allow for preliminary geotechnical investigations to be performed. On April 23, 2018, the TN SHPO concurred with TVA that with the commitments discussed below, intact deposits and contributing structure areas associated with 40WR125 would not be adversely affected by the proposed geotechnical study. A MOA has been developed to ensure that the mill rehabilitation is consistent with NPS standards mentioned above and to mitigate adverse effects to 40WR125. The MOA was executed on February 25, 2020.

The historic cotton mill building may provide potential summer roosting and transitional (migratory) habitat for gray bat, Indiana bat, little brown bat, northern long-eared bat, Rafinesque's big-eared bat, and tricolored bat. Based on field survey findings of one Rafinesque's big-eared bat and one big brown bat in June 2016, it is the recommendation of TVA that building renovation activities take place during the winter clearing window (November 15 through March 31) in order to avoid impacts to roosting or transitional (migrating) bats. Once the mill has been sealed up and transitional bats could not enter, then renovation activities could occur without any species specific restrictions.

The forest within the proposed road relocation was also surveyed for potential summer roosting sites for state and federally listed bats. Surveys for Indiana and northern long-eared bat habitat followed the USFWS's Range-Wide Indiana Bat Survey Guidelines. Approximately 10.3 acres of suitable summer roosting habitat for Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, and tricolored bat would be removed in association with the proposed actions. Foraging habitat for these bat species as well as little brown, gray bats, and Rafinesque's big-eared bat also occurs within and alongside the project footprint in forested areas, forest edges, and over the Collins and Caney Fork Rivers adjacent to project area. These aquatic resources would not be impacted by the proposed actions. The project currently plans to conduct tree removal between November 15 and March 31, when the previously mentioned bat species are in winter hibernacula and not on the landscape roosting in trees. An abundance of similarly suitable forested foraging habitat occurs across immediately surrounding the project footprint.

A number of activities associated with the proposed project were addressed in TVA's programmatic consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on routine actions and federally listed bats in accordance with ESA Section 7(a)(2) and completed in April 2018. For those activities with potential to affect bats, TVA committed to implementing specific conservation measures. These activities and associated conservation measures are identified

on pages 5 and 6 of the TVA Bat Strategy Project Screening Form (attached) and need to be reviewed/implemented as part of the proposed project. With the use of the identified conservation measures, proposed actions are not expected to significantly impact gray bats, Indiana bats, or northern long-eared bats. As a result of these conservation measures impacts to little brown, Rafinesque big-eared, and tricolored bats are also minimized such that proposed actions would not significantly impact populations of these species either.

The proposed easement would comply with the Flood Control Storage Loss Guideline because there is no flood control storage on Great Falls Reservoir. There would be no loss of power storage. By incorporating specific conditions into the easements to minimize adverse impacts, the proposed project would have no significant impact on floodplains and their natural and beneficial values.

A recreation analysis of the proposed project revealed there would be insignificant impacts to trail users by the relocation of SR-287 as it would bisect the Collins River Nature Trail in two locations. Additional insignificant impacts to recreation opportunities would be anticipated during the construction and restoration activities associated with relocating SR-287 and the mill respectively. However, the proposed project is anticipated to provide additional recreational opportunities with the completion of the mill's restoration.

Both noise and visual impacts are anticipated to be minimal and only during construction. Traffic impacts would be minor during construction. Relocating SR-287 away from the mill and associated developed recreation facilities would have beneficial impacts on visitor safety and the overall visitor experience.

An analysis of the socioeconomic impacts of the project indicated direct spending associated with the restoration of the mill and reconstruction of SR-287 would be a short term benefit for the local area to support construction activities. Increasing safety and user experiences by relocating the road would result in increased visitation and spending in the state park and surrounding community. The renovation of the mill into a hotel space would provide additional revenue to the state park system which would percolate through the local economy.

Public and Intergovernmental Review

The proposed use of the historic mill and the potential for development of the State Park has generated interest, particularly within the local community. During the planning process for the Great Falls RLMP, great interest in TDEC's proposal was expressed and numerous requests for additional information were made. Numerous individuals expressed opposition to the proposal to renovate the historic mill and allow commercial use.

On May 14, 2018, TVA published the Draft EA for public review and comment. The availability of the Draft EA was announced in the Southern Standard, which serves the White County and Warren County area and the Draft EA was posted on TVA's website. TVA's agency involvement included notification of the Draft EA to local, state, and federal agencies and federally recognized tribes as part of the review. Chapter 5 provides a list of agencies, tribes, and organizations notified of the availability of the Draft EA. Comments were accepted from May 14, 2018, through June 18, 2018, via TVA's website, mail, and email.

At the end of the comment period, TVA had received comment submissions on the Draft EA from 44 members of the public and intergovernmental agencies, totaling 49 comments. Several individuals submitted multiple comments. One comment was received from a state agency and the remaining comments were received from individuals. The comment submissions were

carefully reviewed and summarized. TVA made revisions to the EA in response to the public comments.

After the preparation and public review of the draft EA in 2018, design constraints were identified in the rerouting of SR 287. TDOT requested a modification in the proposed permanent easement to account for a minor shift in the alignment and to conduct geotechnical investigations. The impacts of this minor shift were analyzed during the preparation of the Final EA. These changes were minor and did not change the conclusions presented to the public in the draft EA.

Mitigation

TVA would implement the routine environmental protection measures listed in this EA. In addition to those routine measures, the following non-routine measures would be implemented to reduce the potential for adverse environmental effects.

To minimize impacts to cultural resources, the following mitigation measures will be incorporated:

- During the February 2018 consultation, TVA committed to the following measures:
 - An MOA will be executed with TVA, TDEC, and the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to address adverse effects to 40WR125 and to develop a treatment plan for the mill.
 - A 50 foot protective boundary (fence) will be placed around both cemeteries during the proposed undertaking. After construction is complete, a permanent fence will be erected to ensure that both cemeteries are avoided.
 - Archeological features associated with 40WR125 could exist under SR 287 and adjacent gravel parking areas. Any proposed disturbance in these areas would be monitored by an archaeologist.

To minimize impacts to threatened and endangered species, the following mitigation measures will be incorporated:

- Several activities associated with the proposed project were addressed in TVA's programmatic consultation with the USFWS on routine actions and federally listed bats in accordance with ESA Section 7(a)(2) and completed in April 2018. For those activities with potential to affect bats, TVA committed to implementing specific conservation measures. These activities and associated conservation measures are identified in TVA's Bat Strategy Project Assessment. TVA would document removal of potentially suitable summer bat roost tree habitat and include this information in annual reporting to the USFWS. The project currently plans to conduct the tree removal between November 15 and March 31, when Indiana and northern long-eared bats are not on the landscape. This would avoid any potential direct impact to young bats at a time when they are unable to fly. Conservation measures must be implemented as identified in the Bat Strategy Form.

To minimize impacts to floodplains, the following mitigation measures will be incorporated as easement conditions:

- Any future facilities or equipment subject to flood damage on the Caney Fork River downstream from Great Falls Dam will be located above elevation 775.0.
- Any future facilities or equipment subject to flood damage on the Caney Fork or Collins River upstream of Great Falls Dam will be located above elevation 821.0.
- Any future development proposed within the limits of the 100-year floodplain will be consistent with the requirements of Executive Order 11988.
- TVA retains the right to permanently flood the easement area upstream of Great Falls Dam to elevation 805, and to temporarily and intermittently flood the entire tract, and TVA will not be liable for damages resulting from flooding.
- No future facilities, including fill, will be constructed, installed, or maintained unless constructed in accordance with plans approved in advance, in writing, by TVA.
- To minimize impacts to the recreating public, the following mitigation measures will be incorporated:
- TDOT would install signage and striping at both road crossings of the Collins River Trail, which would meet DOT and TVA design specifications.

Conclusion and Findings

Based on the findings and the analyses in the EA, TVA concludes that the proposed actions of issuing a 40-year public and commercial recreation easement for the management of TVA lands, the restoration and use of the historic mill, and the issuing of a permanent easement for the relocation of a section of state highway 287 would not be a major federal action significantly affecting the environment. Accordingly, an environmental impact statement is not required.



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Date Signed