

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY**

### **TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – STATE ROUTE 58 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT OVER HIWASSEE RIVER, MEIGS COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

#### **Proposed Action and Need**

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) has submitted to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) applications for land use and for a permit under Section 26a (of the TVA Act) to replace an existing State Route (SR) 58 bridge over the Hiwassee River in Meigs County, Tennessee. The land use application is for a permanent easement to locate the new highway bridge approach on 7.741 acres of TVA property (XTCR-202H), most of it being below normal summer pool elevation 682.5 mean sea level. TDOT plans to replace the 1929 bridge with a new, longer and wider bridge west (downstream) of the existing structure. After completion, the old bridge would be removed. In order to reduce impacts to upstream properties managed for public recreation by the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) and TVA, TWRA has agreed to allow use of 0.766-acre of the Hiwassee River Wildlife Refuge, which is downstream of the existing bridge. Recreation resource impacts were avoided through the project bridge alignment downstream of the existing bridge.

The existing 1929 bridge structure is narrow and in need of expensive repairs. It has been identified as functionally and structurally deficient under Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines. TDOT has proposed to replace the structure. The motoring public and local industry will benefit from improved traffic flow and enjoy upgraded safety features.

#### **Alternatives**

TDOT evaluated three alternatives to the proposed project. The No Action Alternative would not improve the structural or approach deficiencies of the existing 1929 Hiwassee River bridge. Improvements and repairs to the existing bridge were considered, but such improvements or repairs would not upgrade the bridge to current safety standards. Traffic flow would also be disrupted if the bridge were closed for repairs.

Bridge replacement to meet current safety standards is the preferred alternative. Bridge alignment upstream and downstream of the existing bridge was evaluated. By avoiding Meigs County/TWRA's boat ramp and picnic area and the Agency Creek Campground with a downstream alignment, only 0.766 acre of the wildlife refuge would be impacted by the project. The land use for the new bridge alignment would not impact the remaining approximately 2,500-acre Hiwassee River Refuge.

#### **Impacts Assessment**

TDOT/FHWA has completed a Bridge Replacement Categorical Exclusion for the SR 58 Hiwassee River bridge project. TDOT also conducted an evaluation for compliance with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 for acquisition and use of the 0.766-acre of the refuge for the new bridge alignment. TVA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) on the proposed TDOT SR 58 bridge replacement project. The EA looked specifically at potential impacts to wetlands and cultural resources. Other resource areas discussed included water quality, aquatic ecology, traffic, and

solid waste management. Compliance with the Endangered Species Act and Executive Order 11988 (Floodplains) were also evaluated.

The proposed new construction of a replacement bridge would permanently impact 1.02 acre of wetlands and permanently impact 2.60 acres of mud flat. Impacts to wetlands would be primarily from fill to locate the roadway and pier abutments necessary to construct the new bridge and bridge approaches. A temporary impact of 0.20 acre of wetlands would also occur. TDOT has prepared an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan to reduce potential water quality impacts to insignificant levels. The amount, type, quantity, and location of aquatic habitat potential impacted are insignificant within the context of the portion of Hiwassee River influenced by Chickamauga Reservoir.

The project would result in the loss of about 4.2 acre-feet (6,746 cubic yards) of power and flood control storage. Efforts were made to minimize the quantity of fill in the reservoir. The proposed bridge is 742 feet longer than the existing bridge, eliminating that length of fill in the reservoir. Bridge pier and approach fill from the old bridge would be removed to lessen the overall amount of fill used.

The project area contains no historic properties or archaeological resources eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The bridge structure is not eligible for the NRHP. TVA would perform confirmatory studies in one area of the APE (which at normal water level is inundated with water) during minimum winter pool to ensure no archeological resources would be affected by the undertaking.

No federally listed or proposed listed endangered or threatened species occur within the project impact area. TVA has identified a state-listed plant, *Sacciolepis striata* (gibbous panic grass), which appears to be located outside the area to be filled and needs to be avoided by heavy equipment use. TVA would require that any TDOT contractor avoid this area, or relocate the plants if the potential exists to harm the plants.

The existing bridge would be sold as scrap metal in accordance with applicable solid waste regulations. Bridge concrete would be deposited in a landfill, and existing piers would be removed below the mud line.

### **Mitigation**

TDOT would mitigate the 3.62-acres of permanent wetland impacts by debiting from available wetland credits at the Coffee County Wetland Mitigation Bank at a 4:1 ratio. The mud flat impacts would be mitigated at the same ratio as the wetland impacts. At a ratio of 4:1, the total debit of credits rounded to the half acre is 14.5 acres.

TVA would also require that the applicant adhere to construction Best Management Practices for the protection of water quality and aquatic ecology.

### **Public and Intergovernmental Review**

Two public notices were published in response to applications received for permits for the proposed SR 58 Hiwassee River bridge replacement project. The U.S. Coast Guard conducted a public review (Public Notice D8-OBR-731) of the proposed activity with its notice dated June 3, 2003. No major concerns were identified as a result of the Coast Guard public review. The USACE, TVA and State of Tennessee issued Public Notice 04-51 dated August 31, 2004. Again, no significant concerns were identified. USACE completed a Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404(b)(1) analysis for wetland fill below the ordinary high water of Chickamauga Lake

which demonstrated that standard erosion control measures and any additional special conditions would adequately minimize pollution or adverse effects to the affected ecosystem.

The Tennessee State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) stated in his June 18, 2002, letters (2) that the project area contains no historic properties or archaeological resources eligible for listing in the NRHP.

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) letters dated July 19, 2001, July 27, 2003, and September 30, 2004, stated that no federally listed or proposed listed endangered or threatened species occur within the project impact area and that "the requirements of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act are fulfilled." The USFWS also concurred with the proposed wetland mitigation in a letter dated March 23, 2004.

TDOT received from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation a CWA State 401 Water Quality Certification on October 26, 2004.

### **Conclusion and Findings**

TVA has prepared an EA to understand better the possible potential impacts of the proposed bridge replacement downstream of the existing SR 58 Hiwassee River bridge. Based on this review, there are no significant adverse impacts, either individually or cumulatively, on the project area or its environment. TVA has evaluated the project for compliance with Executive Order 11988 on Floodplain Management and has determined that no practicable alternative exists to the proposed river crossing. No federally threatened or endangered species have been identified in the project area. One state-listed species, *Sacciolepis striata* (gibbous panic grass), would be avoided or relocated. Wetland impacts would be mitigated by debiting at a 4:1 ratio from available wetland credits at the Coffee County Wetland Mitigation Bank. No archaeological resources would be affected by this undertaking.

Based on the EA, we conclude that the use of TVA land and issuance of a Section 26a approval for the new bridge would not be a major federal action affecting the environment. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact is contingent upon successful implementation of the attached commitments and TVA's Section 26a conditions for water quality protection.

*Harold M. Draper for*

*December 22, 2004*

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Jon M. Loney, Manager  
NEPA Administration  
Environmental Policy and Planning  
Tennessee Valley Authority

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Date Signed

### **Attachments**

- Commitments
- TVA/USACE EA

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION— STATE ROUTE 58 BRIDGE  
REPLACEMENT OVER HIWASSEE RIVER, MEIGS COUNTY, TENNESSEE

COMMITMENTS

TDOT proposes to mitigate the 3.62 acres of permanent wetland impacts by debiting from available credits at the Coffee County Wetland Mitigation Bank at a 4:1 ratio. The mud flat impacts will be mitigated at the same ratio as the wetland impacts. At a ratio of 4:1, the total debit of credits rounded to the half acre is 14.5 acres.

TVA will require the following conditions in Section 26a approvals:

1. Recent field inspections located a state-listed plant species, *Sacciolepis striata* (gibbous panic grass), at approximate coordinates of 35.36496 degrees North, 84.91195 degrees West, about 150-feet below the toe of the fill. Contractor will avoid any disturbance to this area during construction or relocate the plants if impacts to the plants are unavoidable.
2. For property located below normal summer pool elevation of 682.5 mean sea level, TVA will conduct confirmatory investigations to confirm that no archaeological resources will be affected by this undertaking. No land-disturbing activities will be conducted in this area until confirmatory investigations have been completed.