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Public Notice

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Development

Lock 11 Hydro Partners, LLC : Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment for public review

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) has issued an Environmental Assessment (EA) to meet its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and RUS’s Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) in relation to possible financial assistance for a proposed project by Lock 11 Hydro Partners, LLC. The proposal is for the construction of the College Hill (Lock and Dam 11) Hydroelectric Project (Project) in Estill County, Kentucky. Lock 11 Hydro Partners, LLC have applied to RUS to secure a direct loan to install turbines in the Kentucky River at Lock 11 to generate hydropower (see Figure 1).

The proposed Project would provide hydroelectric generation to meet part of the region’s power requirements, resource diversity, and capacity needs. The proposed Project would have an installed capacity of 3.01 megawatts (MW) and generate approximately 13,556 MWh per year. The Project would provide low-cost power that could displace generation from non-renewable sources. Power produced will be put into a Clark Energy Rural Electric Cooperative distribution line, wheeled over to the East Kentucky Power Cooperative (EKPC) Union City substation, and then be put into the EKPC system.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Questions and comments should be emailed to the Environmental and Historic Preservation Division, USDA Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service at:
RUSPublicComments@usda.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed Project would be located at Lock and Dam Number 11 at river mile 201.0 on the Kentucky River. Lock and Dam Number 11 is owned by the Commonwealth of Kentucky and operated by the Kentucky River Authority for water supply (see Figure 2). The existing 208-foot-long fixed crest concrete dam has a 148-foot-long by 52-foot-wide lock chamber. The lock chamber of the structure is abandoned, and a concrete bulkhead has been placed in the lock chamber, below the upper miter gates, to prevent failure and loss of pool.

Lock 11 Hydro Partners would remove the concrete bulkhead and construct a 28.4-foot by 52-foot by 49.5-foot steel and reinforced concrete powerhouse in the abandoned lock chamber. Four 642-kW Voith 14.9 and two 222-kW Voith 8.95 StreamDiver turbine-generators would be installed into the lock chamber. These submersible units directly couple permanent magnet generators with turbines, eliminating the need for a gearbox and associated oil lubrication. A prefabricated-steel and reinforced 42-foot by 20-foot by 28-foot concrete control building would be installed atop a concrete foundation at the edge of the existing concrete esplanade and would be connected to the powerhouse via an underground cable trench. The control building would house the switchgear, controls, transformers, and the main circuit breaker for the plant. The control building would also serve as the interconnection point to the existing 12.47-kV, three-phase overhead distribution line.

ICF Jones & Stokes, Inc., an environmental consultant, prepared an EA for Lock 11 Hydro Partners that describes the proposed Project, assesses the proposed Project’s environmental impacts, and summarizes applicable mitigation measures used to minimize environmental effects. RUS has conducted an independent evaluation of the EA and believes that it accurately assesses the impacts of the proposed Project. No significant impacts are expected as a result of Project construction or operation.

Written questions and comments should be emailed to RUS at the email address provided above. RUS will accept questions and comments on the environmental assessment for 14 days from the first date of publication of this notice. All comments must be provided electronically with no hard copy comments being accepted at this time.

Copies of the EA and supporting documentation will be available for public review on RUS’s website at:
<https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessment/college-hill-lock-and-dam-11-hydroelectric-project>

Any final action by RUS related to the proposed Project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal environmental laws and regulations and completion of environmental review procedures as prescribed by 7 CFR Part 1970, Environmental Policies and Procedures.

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Twenty-five years ago, I sat in a chair on Centre College’s campus, clad in cap and gown, prepared—but hardly ready—to graduate. For the first time in my life, I was adrift. I had a plan, but no conviction. I was unsure whether the path ahead was mine or simply the one I had chosen because I didn’t know what else to choose.

Centre, like most colleges, typically invited a prominent figure to deliver the commencement address. That year, however, the graduating class selected one of our own—Dr. Larry Matheny. It was a decision that surprised no one, especially his students.

Dr. Matheny was more than a professor; he was an institution. Nearly four decades teaching government, a dry wit as sharp as his intellect, a fondness for gin, and a rumored familiarity with every book in the college library made him a figure of lore. I took eight of his classes during my time at Centre. Technically, I majored in government, but if I’m honest, I majored in Matheny.

As I had done so many times before, I listened to him closely. There was the expected humor, of course, but then he said something that landed with such clarity it has stayed with me ever since: “When you graduate from Centre College, you don’t know how to do anything . . . except learn. But if you know how to learn, you can do most anything in life.”

That statement has echoed in my mind each May as a new crop of graduates turns their tassels. It came back especially strong recently during an online exchange I had about the purpose of education. A friend insisted that the goal of education is job preparation. I pushed back—because while preparing people for the workforce is valuable, it is not the same thing as educating them. Nor do I think that should be the sole goal.

Somewhere along the way, we started conflating education with vocational training. We now expect students to emerge from college ready to plug directly into their chosen profession. Any class not deemed “practical” is dismissed as wasteful. Entire disciplines—literature, philosophy, art history—are cast aside as indulgent because they don’t come with a clear paycheck.

Even a former Kentucky Lieutenant Governor once took a swipe at history majors a few years back. As someone who has spent a good portion of his adult life studying history, I took that a bit personally.

Then there are the critics who declare that college is a waste of time altogether. And truly, college is not for everyone. “You could make more money in a skilled trade,” they argue. And they’re not wrong—many trades are both stable and lucrative. Eight weeks of training can land you in the cab of a semi-truck, with the average salary hovering near \$90,000. That’s real, respectable work.

Is a French literature major likely to make that kind of money reading Rimbaud in the original language? Probably not. Do dentists need to study metaphysics to fill a cavity? Of course not. That’s not the point.

The question we should be asking isn’t, “What job will this get me?” It’s, “What understanding will this give me?” Because the essence of education isn’t the memorization of facts—it’s the cultivation of understanding. It’s one thing to know the definition of an atom; it’s another to grasp how atoms behave. It’s one thing to summarize a novel; it’s another to understand what the author intended to convey. Knowing the dates of a war is easy. Understanding the forces that led to it—and the ones it unleashed—is much harder.

If education were merely about job training, we could all stop learning once we punched the clock. And sadly, many do. But I believe education is about more than utility. It’s about becoming a fuller, better version of ourselves.

Plato wrote, “If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life.” I take that to heart. I don’t want to learn just to work. I want to learn to grow. To better understand the world around me—and the one within me. To take knowledge and turn it into comprehension, and hopefully, over time, into wisdom.

I may never learn everything. But I fully intend to die trying.