This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## **Rural Utilities Service**

Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement To Evaluate Aquifer Appropriations at the Burr Well Field and To Fund the Design and Construction of the Northeast Phase of the Lincoln-Pipestone Rural Water System

**AGENCY:** Rural Utilities Service, USDA. **ACTION:** Notice of intent.

**SUMMARY:** The Rural Utilities Service (RUS), USDA announces its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (U.S.C. 4231 et seq.) in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508) and Agency regulations 7 CFR 1940-G. The primary scope of the EIS is to evaluate water appropriations from a hydrological subunit of the Prairie Coteau Aquifer at the Burr Well Field for the Lincoln-Pipestone Rural Water System (LPRWS) in southwestern Minnesota and its potential affects on surface water bodies and wetlands in the area and to evaluate the environmental impacts of an expansion phase of LPRWS-the Northeast Phase. With this notice, RUS invites any affected Federal, State, and local Agencies and other interested persons to comment on the scope and the significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the EIS.

**DATES:** Written comments on the scope of the EIS will be accepted 30 days after the public scoping meetings are held.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be sent to Mark S. Plank, USDA, Rural Economic and Community Development Services, Rural Utilities Service, Program Support Staff, AG Box 0761, Washington, DC 20250, telephone (202) 720–1640 or Fax (202) 690–4335.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John J. Melbo, USDA, Rural Economic and Community Development Services, 410 AgriBank Building, 375 Jackson Street, St. Paul, MN 55101–1853, telephone (612) 290–3842 or Mark S. Plank, USDA, Rural Economic and Community Development Services, Rural Utilities Service, Program Support Staff, AG Box 0761, Room 6309, Washington, DC 20250–0761, telephone (202) 720–1640.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: From a historic perspective, water in adequate quantity and quality has been difficult to obtain in southwest Minnesota. Periodic drought conditions often deplete already marginal supplies. Shallow farm wells in the area have been affected by drought and pollution from agricultural run-off that has resulted in nitrate and pesticide contamination. Deeper wells in the area are costly to construct and usually yield highly mineralized water with high levels of iron, manganese, and sulfates. In an attempt to resolve water supply difficulties, the LPRWS, headquartered in Lake Benton, Minnesota, was organized as a Minnesota municipality for the sole purpose of delivering and supplying high quality water supplies to rural users and various municipalities. LPRWS is governed by a board of commissioners who are appointed by the District Court. Water supply costs are borne by LPRWS customers and through various federal grants.

LPRWS currently provides water service to 1,700 rural customers and seventeen cities in southwest Minnesota. LPRWS has constructed its water system in various phases and has utilized several well fields to provide water for the different phases. The current phase, in which concerns have been raised, is the Existing System North/Lyon County Expansion project. The well field designed to supply water for this phase and future service areas in the Burr Well Field. The Burr Well Field is utilizing a subunit of the Prairie Coteau aquifer. The Prarie Coteau aquifer is collectively defined as numerous lenticular bodies of glacial outwash buried beneath a surficial layer of glacial till and within a thick layer of glacial drift.

RUS, and its predecessor agencies, has provided a series of loans and grants

to fund infrastructure development for the LPRWS. As required by NEPA, RUS has prepared a series of Environmental Assessments (EA) for the various phases. The previous EA conducted for the Existing North/Lyon County Expansion phase was completed in 1992 with an issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on February 17, 1992. During the construction phase of the water treatment plant at the Burr Well Field concerns were raised by local citizens and state regulatory bodies concerning potential impacts to surface water bodies and wetland areas from groundwater appropriations at the Burr Well Field. To respond to these concerns RUS decided to amend the earlier EA and re-examine the issues raised by concerned parties. Upon completion of the EA amendment, RUS concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement was necessary to fully evaluate the technical issues raised by the concerned parties.

The primary unresolved concern includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation of water from the Prairie Coteau aquifer at the Burr Well Field site. As mentioned above, the Burr Well Field is utilizing a subunit of the Prairie Coteau aquifer. This subunit appears to be one of the aforementioned lenticular bodies of outwash within a larger deposit of glacial drift and is under artesian conditions within its areal extent and at the well head site. The artesian nature of the outwash body is the source of the concern. It is hypothesized that due to localized artesian conditions, numerous surface water bodies and wetland areas receive, through a hydraulic connection, an undetermined quantity of water as recharge and that the recharge sustains water levels in these areas. Since the Burr Well Field is utilizing this aquifer, it is alleged that sustained appropriation of water at the well head may adversely reduce recharge to area wetlands and lakes, thus altering water budgets for these resources. The EIS will attempt to evaluate these concerns, as well as, evaluate environmental impacts from the construction of the Northeast Phase.

Two public meetings will be held in the project area to receive oral and written comments. One meeting will be held in Minnesota and the other one in South Dakota. Detail about these meetings will be announced later in area newspapers. Oral comments received at

Federal Register Vol. 60, No. 110 Thursday, June 8, 1995

## Notices