

Notices

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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

Submission for OMB Review; Comment Request

The Department of Agriculture has submitted the following information collection requirement(s) to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and clearance under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104–13. Comments are requested regarding: whether the collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments regarding this information collection received by February 20, 2025 will be considered. Written comments and recommendations for the proposed information collection should be submitted within 30 days of the publication of this notice on the following website www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain. Find this particular information collection by selecting "Currently under 30-day Review—Open for Public Comments" or by using the search function.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor a collection of information unless the collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number and the agency informs potential persons who are to respond to the collection of information that such persons are not required to respond to the collection of information unless it

displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Rural Utilities Service

Title: RUS Electric Loan Application and Related Reporting Burdens.

OMB Control Number: 0572–0032.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) was established in 1994 by the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103–354, 108 Stat. 3178, 7 U.S.C. 6941 *et seq.*) as successor to the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) with respect to certain programs, including the electric loan and loan guarantee program authorized under the Rural Electrification Act (RE Act) of 1936. The RE Act authorizes and empowers the Administrator of RUS to make and guarantee loans to furnish and improve electric service in rural areas. These loans are amortized over a period of up to 35 years and secured by the borrower's electric assets and/or revenue. RUS will collect information including studies and reports to support borrower loan applications.

Need and Use of the Information: RUS will collect information to determine the eligibility of applicants for loans and loan guarantees under the RE Act; monitor the compliance of borrowers with debt covenants and regulatory requirements in order to protect loan security; ensure that borrowers use loan funds for purposes consistent with the statutory goals of the RE Act; and obtain information on the progress of rural electrification and evaluate the success of RUS program activities. Without the information RUS would be unable to accomplish statutory goals.

Description of Respondents: Private Sector; Not-for-profit institutions.

Number of Respondents: 608.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting; On occasion; Annually.

Total Burden Hours: 37,515.

Rural Utilities Service

Title: Telecommunications System Construction Policies and Procedures.

OMB Control Number: 0572–0059.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Electrification Act of 1936 (RE Act), 7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*, was amended in 2002 by title IV, Rural Broadband Access, by Farm Security and rural Investment Act, which authorizes Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to provide loans and loan

guarantees to fund the cost of construction, improvement, or acquisition for facilities and equipment for the provision of broadband service in eligible rural communities in the States and territories of the United States. Title VI of the RE Act requires that loans are granted only to borrowers who demonstrated that they will be able to repay in full within the time agreed. RUS has established certain standards and specification for materials, equipment and construction to assure that standards are maintained; loans are not adversely affected, and loans are used for intended purposes.

Need and Use of the Information: RUS has developed specific forms for borrowers to use when entering into contracts for goods or services. The information collected is used to implement certain provisions of loan documents about the borrower's purchase of materials and equipment and the construction of its broadband system and is provided on an as needed basis or when the individual borrower undertakes certain projects. The standardization of the forms has resulted in substantial savings to borrowers by reducing preparation of the documentation and the costly review by the Government.

Description of Respondents: Private Sector; Business or other for-profit; Not-for-profit institutions.

Number of Respondents: 1,434.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting; On occasion.

Total Burden Hours: 7,703.

Rural Utilities Service

Title: 7 CFR 1726, Electric System Construction Policies and Procedures—Electric.

OMB Control Number: 0572–0107.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Electrification Act of 1936, 7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*, as amended, (RE ACT) in sec. 4 (7 U.S.C. 904) authorizes and empowers the Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to make loans in the several States and Territories of the United States for rural electrification and the furnishing and improving of electric energy to persons in rural areas. These loans are for a term of up to 35 years and are secured by a first mortgage on the borrower's electric system. In the interest of protecting loan security and accomplishing the statutory objective of a sound program of rural electrification, Section 4 of the RE Act further requires

that RUS make or guarantee a loan only if there is reasonable assurance that the loan, together with all outstanding loans and obligations of the borrower, will be repaid in full within the time agreed. RUS will collect information using various RUS forms.

Need and Use of the Information: RUS will collect information to implement certain provisions of the RUS standard form of loan documents regarding the borrower's purchase of materials and equipment and the construction of its electric system by contract or force account. The use of standard forms and procurement procedures helps assure RUS that appropriate standards and specifications are maintained; agency loan security is not adversely affected; and loan and loan guarantee funds are used effectively and for the intended purposes. The information will be used by RUS electric borrowers, their contractors and by RUS. If standard forms were not used, borrowers would need to prepare their own documents at a significant expense; and each document submitted by a borrower would require extensive and costly review by both RUS and the Office of the General Counsel.

Description of Respondents: Private Sector; Not-for-profit institutions; Business or other for-profit.

Number of Respondents: 477.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting: On occasion.

Total Burden Hours: 82.

Rural Utilities Service

Title: Technical Assistance Program, 7 CFR part 1775.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0112.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Utilities Service is authorized by section 306 of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1926) to make loans to public agencies, American Indian Tribes, and nonprofit corporations to fund the development of drinking water, wastewater, and solid waste disposal facilities in rural areas with populations of up to 10,000 residents. Under the CONACT, 7 U.S.C. 1925(a), as amended, section 306(a) (14) (A) authorizes Technical Assistance and Training grants, and 7 U.S.C. 1932(b), section 310B authorizes Solid Waste Management grants. Grants are made for 100 percent of the cost of assistance. The Technical Assistance and Training Grants and Solid Waste Management Grants programs are administered through 7 CFR part 1775.

Need and Use of the Information: Nonprofit organizations applying for TAT and SWM grants must submit a pre-application, which includes an

application form, narrative proposal, various other forms, certifications and supplemental information. RUS will collect information to determine applicant's eligibility, project feasibility, and the applicant's ability to meet the grant and regulatory requirements. RUS will review the information, evaluate it, and, if the applicant and project are eligible for further competition, invite the applicant to submit a formal application. Failure to collect proper information could result in improper determinations of eligibility, improper use of funds, or hindrances in making grants authorized by the TAT and SWM program.

Description of Respondents: Private Sector; Not-for-profit institutions.

Number of Respondents: 66.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting: Annually; On occasion.

Total Burden Hours: 5,558.

Rural Utilities Service

Title: 7 CFR part 1724 and Part 1738 Electric Engineering, Architectural Services and Design Policies and Procedures; and Rural Broadband Access Loans and Loan Guarantees.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0118.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Electrification Act of 1936, 7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*, as amended, authorizes Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to make loans in several States and Territories of the United States for broadband access and rural electrification and the furnishing and improving of electric energy to persons in rural areas. Title 7 CFR 1724 requires each borrower to select a qualified architect to perform certain architectural services and to use the designated form that provides for these services. The agency has developed standardized contractual forms used by borrowers to contract for services.

Need and Use of the Information: The information collected stipulates the parties to the agreement, contain certain information relating to the approved loan or loan guarantee, and provide detailed contractual obligations and services to be provided and performed relating to construction, project design, construction management, compensation, and related information. The contractual forms provide standardized contract agreements between the electric or broadband borrower and the engineering or architectural firm providing services to the borrower. This has resulted in substantial savings to borrowers by reducing preparation of the documentation and the costly review by the Government.

Description of Respondents: Private Sector; Business or other for-profit.

Number of Respondents: 4.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting: On occasion.

Total Burden Hours: 8.

Rural Utility Service

Title: 7 CFR 1780, Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0121.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Utilities Service ("RUS"), an agency of the Rural Development ("RD"), United States Department of Agriculture, is requesting OMB clearance of the reporting requirements relating to 7 CFR part 1780, the regulation utilized to administer the Water and Waste Loans and Grants program. In addition, RUS is seeking clearance for applicants applying under 7 CFR part 1777, section 306C Water and Waste Disposal Loans and Grant," and 7 CFR part 1778, "Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants", which follow 7 CFR part 1780 for application requirements.

Section 306 of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act ("CONACT"), 7 U.S.C. 1926, authorizes RUS to make loans and grants to public entities, federally-recognized American Indian Tribes, and not-for-profit corporations. The loans and grants fund the development of drinking water, wastewater, solid waste disposal, and storm wastewater disposal facilities in rural areas with populations of up to 10,000 residents. A rural area is defined in the CONACT as any city, town, or unincorporated area consisting of no more than 10,000 residents. In addition to the development costs, 7 CFR 1780.9, Eligible loan and grant purposes, defines the associated costs that are eligible for reimbursement, such as reasonable engineering and legal expenses. The agency uses information submitted by applicant entities to determine eligibility and evaluate project feasibility.

Need and Use of the Information: RD state and field offices collect the information from applicants, borrowers, and consultants. They use the information to determine applicant eligibility and project feasibility. They also use the information to ensure that borrowers operate on a sound basis and use the loan and grant funds for authorized purposes as defined in statute and regulation.

Description of Respondents: State, Local or Tribal Government; Not-for-profit institutions.

Number of Respondents: 656.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting: On occasion.

Total Burden Hours: 109,200.

Rural Utility Service

Title: Servicing of Water Programs Loans and Grants.

OMB Control Number: 0572–0137.

Summary of Collection: This information collection package covers the Servicing of Water Programs Loans and Grants regulation, 7 CFR part 1782. The regulation outlines the Rural Utilities Service's (RUS), an agency delivering the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development Utilities Programs, hereinafter referred to as Rural Development (RD) and/or Agency, policies and procedures for servicing direct and insured Water and Waste Disposal loans and grants (WWLG); Watershed loans and advances (Watershed); Resource Conservation and Development loans (RCDL); Technical Assistance and Training grants (TAT); Emergency Community Water Assistance grants (ECWAG); Solid Waste Management grants (SWMG); and section 306C Water and Waste Facility loans and grants (Colonias/Tribal).

Need and Use of the Information: The Rural Utilities Service will collect information using various forms. The Agency provides forms and/or guidelines to assist in collection and submission of the information required to service loans and grants. In some cases, use of Agency forms is optional and the borrower may submit the information required on other forms. The Agency utilizes existing Rural Development forms to the greatest extent possible to continue to meet the needs of the program. The forms or related items completed by the borrower are submitted to and evaluated by the Agency servicing office. The information, mostly financial in nature, is required to determine if borrowers, based on their individual situations, qualify for the various servicing authorities.

Description of Respondents: State, Local, and Tribal Governments.

Number Of Respondents: 4,438.

Frequency Of Responses: Reporting: On occasion.

Total Burden Hours: 28,140.

Rural Utilities Service

Title: 7 CFR 1776, Household Water Well System Grant Program.

OMB Control Number: 0572–0139.

Summary of Collection: This program was formerly the Household Water Well System Grant Program, but its name was changed by the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018. This regulation is used to administer grants made to private non-profit organizations under the DWS program. The Agency is

authorized to make the grants under Section 306E of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (CONACT) 7 U.S.C. 1926e.

Need and Use of the Information: The grant applicants will provide information to be collected as part of the application and grant process through certain documentation, certifications, and completed forms. Grant applicants must show that the project will provide technical and financial assistance to eligible individuals to remedy household well problems. The grant recipients will establish a revolving loan fund lending program to provide water well loans to individuals who own or will own private wells in rural areas. The individual loan recipients may use the funds to construct, refurbish, and service their household well systems for an existing home.

Description of Respondents: Private Sector; Not-for-profit institutions.

Number of Respondents: 7.

Frequency of Responses: Reporting: On occasion.

Total Burden Hours: 652.

Rural Utilities Service

Title: Special Authority to Enable Funding of Broadband and Smart Utility Facilities Across Select Rural Development Programs.

OMB Control Number: 0572–0156.

Summary of Collection: The Rural Utilities Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, and Rural Housing Service, agencies that comprise the Rural Development Mission Area within the United States Department of Agriculture, are issuing this final rule to establish the authority authorized by Section 6210 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. This rule describes the procedures by which these agencies will consider projects eligible for special broadband authority and Smart Utility facilities.

On December 20, 2018, Congress passed The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) (Pub. L. 115–334). In addition to sweeping changes in broadband program authorities, Congress provided for special use of funding from other RD programs for broadband deployment in Section 6210, "Smart Utility Authority for Broadband." The provision granted the Secretary of Agriculture the discretion to allow recipients of grants, loans, or loan guarantees under RD programs to use not more than 10 percent of such funding to finance broadband infrastructure in areas not served by the minimum acceptable level of broadband service, as defined in this Part, and which will not result in competitive harm to a current RD loan,

grant, or loan guarantee. While section 6210 only imposes the competitive harm restriction with respect to RUS loan, grant, and loan guarantee recipients, RD has determined to apply the restriction RD-wide, consistent with the statutory guidance on conflicts and duplications of awards provided in 7 U.S.C. 2204b(d)(2).

Rural community leaders, businesses and utilities must consider broadband availability and uses as they plan for, and implement, new and improved facilities and services to support community and economic development. While integration of communications technology into a planned investment can be used for internal purposes, it can also serve as a catalyst to rural broadband deployment efforts. For example, investment in health care, public safety and businesses can be enhanced or leveraged to expand the availability and utilization of advanced broadband in rural areas. Smart highways can facilitate vehicle to infrastructure communications to enhance driver safety; smart water systems can remotely detect contaminants before they pose a health risk; smart pipelines can report leaks and structural weaknesses before they become dangerous; and smart grid systems deliver enhanced security and energy efficiency, as well as speed recovery after an electric outage. Through this regulation, RD enables limited integration of broadband deployment with other rural investments funded through its broad suite of programs. It does so without adding the burden of seeking funding through separate program areas.

Need and Use of the Information: The collection of information is necessary for RD to determine an applicant's ability to borrow under the terms of the 2018 Farm Bill and included programs and that the applicant complies with statutory, regulatory, and administrative eligibility requirements for loan assistance. As part of that submission, applicants are required to provide a service area map, where applicable, of their entire service territory.

Description of Respondents: Private Sector; Businesses or other for-profits.

Number of Respondents: 53.

Frequency of Responses: Annually.

Total Burden Hours: 239.

Levi S. Harrell,

Departmental Information Collection Clearance Officer.

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