DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Notice of Proposed Changes to Section I of the Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guide

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

ACTION: Notice of availability of proposed changes in the NRCS Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guides for review and comment.

SUMMARY: NRCS is proposing to revise Section I of the Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guide to include “Wisconsin Wetland Determination Methods” which will replace the existing “Wisconsin Wetland Mapping Conventions issued May 1, 1998” (commonly referred as State Wetland Mapping Conventions). The Wisconsin Wetland Determination Methods will be used as part of the technical documents and procedures to conduct wetland determinations on agricultural land as part of the Food Security Act of 1985 (as amended).

DATES: Effective Date: Effective October 18, 2016. Guidance for Wisconsin Wetland Determination Methods is in final draft status.

Comment Date: Submit comments on or before November 17, 2016. The final version of the Wisconsin Wetland Determination Methods will be adopted after the close of the 30-day period and after consideration of all comments.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be submitted, identified by Docket Number NRCS–2016–0010, using any of the following methods:

• Federal eRulemaking Portal: http://www.regulations.gov. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
• Mail or hand-delivery: Submit state specific comments to the Wisconsin NRCS State Office, located at 8030 Excelsior Drive, Suite 200, Madison, WI 53737–2906.

• NRCS will post all comments on http://www.regulations.gov. In general, personal information provided with comments will be posted. If your comment includes your address, phone number, email, or other personal identifying information, your comments, including personal information, may be available to the public. You may ask in your comment that your personal identifying information be withheld from public view, but this cannot be guaranteed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jimmy Bramblett, Wisconsin State Conservationist. Phone: 608–662–4422, by email at jimmy.bramblett@wi.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Guidance for Wisconsin Wetland Determination Methods will be used as part of the technical documents and procedures to conduct wetland determinations on agricultural land as required by 16 U.S.C. 3822. NRCS is required by 16 U.S.C. 3862 to make available for public review and comment all proposed revisions to standards and procedures used to carry out highly erodible land and wetland provisions of the law.

All comments will be considered. If no comments are received, Guidance for Wisconsin Wetland Determination Methods will be considered final.

Electronic copies of the proposed Guidance for Wisconsin Wetland Determination Methods are available through http://www.regulations.gov by accessing Docket No. NRCS–2016–0010. Alternatively, copies can be downloaded or printed from the Wisconsin NRCS Web site located at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/wi/home/. Requests for paper versions or inquiries may be directed to the Wisconsin State Conservationist at the contact point shown above.

Signed this 5th day of October, 2016, in Madison, WI.

Jimmy Bramblett,
State Conservationist.
I. Program Description

The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) helps agricultural producers and rural small businesses reduce energy costs and consumption and helps meet the Nation’s critical energy needs. REAP has two types of funding assistance: (1) Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements Assistance and (2) Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance Grants.

The Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements Assistance provides grants and guaranteed loans to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements. Eligible renewable energy systems for REAP provide energy from: Wind, solar, renewable biomass (including anaerobic digesters), small hydro-electric, ocean, geothermal, or hydrogen derived from these renewable resources.

The Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance Grant is available to a unit of State, Tribal, or local government; institution of higher education; rural electric cooperative; a public power entity; or a council, as defined in 16 U.S.C. 3451. The recipient of grant funds, (grantee), will establish a program to assist agricultural producers and rural small businesses with evaluating the energy efficiency and the potential to incorporate renewable energy technologies into their operations.

A. General. Applications for REAP can be submitted any time throughout the year. This Notice announces the deadline times and dates that applications have to be received to be considered for REAP funds provided by the Agricultural Act of 2014, (2014 Farm Bill), and any appropriated funds that REAP may receive from the congressional enactment of a full-year appropriation for Federal FY 2017. This Notice is being published prior to the congressional enactment of a full-year appropriation for Federal FY 2017. The Agency will continue to process applications received under this announcement and should REAP receive appropriated funds, these funds will be announced on the following Web site: www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-energy-america-program.

B. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number. 10.868.

C. Funds Available. This Notice is announcing deadline times and dates for applications to be submitted for REAP funds provided by the 2014 Farm Bill and any appropriated funds that REAP may receive from the congressional enactment of a full-year appropriation for Federal FY 2017. This Notice is being published prior to the congressional enactment of a full-year appropriation for Federal FY 2017. The Agency will continue to process applications received under this announcement and should REAP receive appropriated funds, these funds will be announced on the following Web site: www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-energy-america-program.

II. Federal Award Information

A. Statutory Authority. This program is authorized under 7 U.S.C. 8107.

B. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number. 10.868.

C. Funds Available. This Notice is announcing deadline times and dates for applications to be submitted for REAP funds provided by the 2014 Farm Bill and any appropriated funds that REAP may receive from the congressional enactment of a full-year appropriation for Federal FY 2017. This Notice is being published prior to the congressional enactment of a full-year appropriation for Federal FY 2017. The Agency will continue to process applications received under this announcement and should REAP receive appropriated funds, these funds will be announced on the following Web site: www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-energy-america-program.

D. Approximate Number of Awards. The estimated number of awards is 1,000 based on the historical average grant size and the anticipated mandatory funding level of $30 million for Federal FY 2017, but will depend on the actual amount of funds made available and on the number of eligible applicants participating in this program.

E. Type of Instrument. Grant, guaranteed loan, and grant/guaranteed loan combinations.

III. Eligibility Information

The eligibility requirements for the applicant, borrower, lender, and project (as applicable) are summarized in this Notice. Failure to
meet the eligibility criteria by the time of the competition window may result in the Agency reviewing an application, but will preclude the application from receiving funding until all criteria have been met.

A. Eligible Applicants. This solicitation is for agricultural producers and rural small businesses, as well as units of State, Tribal, or local government; instrumentalities of a State, Tribal, or local government; institutions of higher education; rural electric cooperatives; public power entities; and councils, as defined in 16 U.S.C. 3451, which serve agricultural producers and rural small businesses. To be eligible for the grant portion of the program, an applicant must meet the requirements specified in 7 CFR 4280.109, 7 CFR 4280.110, and 7 CFR 4280.112, or 7 CFR 4280.186, as applicable.

B. Eligible Lenders and Borrowers. To be eligible for the guaranteed portion of the program, lenders and borrowers must meet the eligibility requirements in 7 CFR 4280.125 and 7 CFR 4280.127, as applicable.

C. Eligible Projects. To be eligible for this program, a project must meet the eligibility requirements specified in 7 CFR 4280.113, 7 CFR 4280.128, and 7 CFR 4280.187, as applicable.

D. Cost Sharing or Matching. The 2014 Farm Bill mandates the maximum percentages of funding that REAP can provide. Additional clarification is provided in paragraphs IV.F.(1) through (3).

(1) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements funding. Requests for guaranteed loan and combined grant and guaranteed loan will not exceed 75 percent of eligible project costs, with any Federal grant portion not to exceed 25 percent of the total eligible project costs, whether the grant is part of a combination request or is a grant-only.

(2) Energy audit and renewable energy development funds. Requests for the energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants, will indicate that the grantee that conducts energy audits must require that, as a condition of providing the energy audit, the agricultural producer or rural small business pay at least 25 percent of the cost of the energy audit. The Agency recommended practice for on farm energy audits, audits for agricultural producers, ranchers, and farmers is the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers S612 Level II audit. This audit conforms with program standards used by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. An applicant that has received one or more grants under this program must make satisfactory progress as indicated in 7 CFR 4280.100, which has been determined by the Agency to be the expenditure of 50 percent or more of the previously awarded grant by January 31, 2017, to be considered eligible for subsequent funding.

E. Other. Ineligible project costs can be found in 7 CFR 4280.114(d), 7 CFR 4280.129(f), and 7 CFR 4280.188(c), as applicable. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Departmental Regulations and Laws that contain other compliance requirements are referenced in paragraphs VI.B.(1) through (3), and IV.F of this Notice. Applicants who have been found to be in violation of applicable Federal statutes will be ineligible.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package. Application materials may be obtained by contacting one of Rural Development’s Energy Coordinators, as identified via the following link: www.rd.usda.gov/files/RBS_EnergyCoordinators.pdf. In addition, for grant applications, applicants may obtain electronic grant applications for REAP from www.grants.gov.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission. Applicants seeking to participate in this program must submit applications in accordance with this Notice and 7 CFR part 4280, subpart B. Applicants must submit complete applications by the dates identified in Section IV.C. of this Notice, containing all parts necessary for the Agency to determine applicant and project eligibility, to score the application, and to conduct the technical evaluation, as applicable, in order to be considered.

(1) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements grant application.

(a) Information for the required content of a grant application to be considered complete is found in 7 CFR part 4280, subpart B.

(i) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of $80,000 or less must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.119.

(ii) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of greater than $200,000 must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.117.

(iv) Grant applications for energy audits or renewable energy development assistance grant applications must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.190.

(b) All grant applications must be submitted either as hard copy to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located, or electronically using the Government-wide www.grants.gov Web site.

(i) Applicants submitting a grant application as a hard copy must submit one original to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located. A list of USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinators is available via the following link: www.rd.usda.gov/files/RBS_EnergyCoordinators.pdf.

(ii) Applicants submitting a grant application to the Agency via www.grants.gov (Web site) will find information about submitting an application electronically through the Web site, and may download a copy of the application package to complete it off line, upload and submit the completed application, including all necessary assurances and certifications, via www.grants.gov. After electronically submitting an application through the Web site, the applicant will receive an automated acknowledgement from www.grants.gov that contains a www.grants.gov tracking number. USDA Rural Development strongly recommends that applicants do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through www.grants.gov.

(c) After successful applicants are notified of the intent to make a Federal award, applicants must meet the requirements of 7 CFR 4280.122 (a) through (h) for the grant agreement to be executed.

(2) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan application.

(a) Information for the content required for a guaranteed loan application to be considered complete is found in 7 CFR part 4280, subpart B.

(i) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of $80,000 or less must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.119.

(ii) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of greater than $200,000 must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.117.

(iii) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of greater than $200,000 must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.119.

(iv) Grant applications for energy audits or renewable energy development assistance grant applications must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.190.

(b) All grant applications must be submitted either as hard copy to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located, or electronically using the Government-wide www.grants.gov Web site.

(i) Applicants submitting a grant application as a hard copy must submit one original to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located. A list of USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinators is available via the following link: www.rd.usda.gov/files/RBS_EnergyCoordinators.pdf.

(ii) Applicants submitting a grant application to the Agency via www.grants.gov (Web site) will find information about submitting an application electronically through the Web site, and may download a copy of the application package to complete it off line, upload and submit the completed application, including all necessary assurances and certifications, via www.grants.gov. After electronically submitting an application through the Web site, the applicant will receive an automated acknowledgement from www.grants.gov that contains a www.grants.gov tracking number. USDA Rural Development strongly recommends that applicants do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through www.grants.gov.

(c) After successful applicants are notified of the intent to make a Federal award, applicants must meet the requirements of 7 CFR 4280.122 (a) through (h) for the grant agreement to be executed.

(2) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan application.

(a) Information for the content required for a guaranteed loan application to be considered complete is found in 7 CFR part 4280, subpart B.

(i) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of $80,000 or less must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.119.

(ii) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of greater than $200,000 must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.117.

(iv) Grant applications for energy audits or renewable energy development assistance grant applications must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.190.

(b) All grant applications must be submitted either as hard copy to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located, or electronically using the Government-wide www.grants.gov Web site.

(i) Applicants submitting a grant application as a hard copy must submit one original to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located. A list of USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinators is available via the following link: www.rd.usda.gov/files/RBS_EnergyCoordinators.pdf.

(ii) Applicants submitting a grant application to the Agency via www.grants.gov (Web site) will find information about submitting an application electronically through the Web site, and may download a copy of the application package to complete it off line, upload and submit the completed application, including all necessary assurances and certifications, via www.grants.gov. After electronically submitting an application through the Web site, the applicant will receive an automated acknowledgement from www.grants.gov that contains a www.grants.gov tracking number. USDA Rural Development strongly recommends that applicants do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through www.grants.gov.

(c) After successful applicants are notified of the intent to make a Federal award, applicants must meet the requirements of 7 CFR 4280.122 (a) through (h) for the grant agreement to be executed.

(2) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan application.

(a) Information for the content required for a guaranteed loan application to be considered complete is found in 7 CFR part 4280, subpart B.

(i) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of $80,000 or less must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.119.

(ii) Grant applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements projects with total project costs of greater than $200,000 must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.117.

(iv) Grant applications for energy audits or renewable energy development assistance grant applications must provide information required by 7 CFR 4280.190.

(b) All grant applications must be submitted either as hard copy to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located, or electronically using the Government-wide www.grants.gov Web site.

(i) Applicants submitting a grant application as a hard copy must submit one original to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located. A list of USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinators is available via the following link: www.rd.usda.gov/files/RBS_EnergyCoordinators.pdf.

(ii) Applicants submitting a grant application to the Agency via www.grants.gov (Web site) will find information about submitting an application electronically through the Web site, and may download a copy of the application package to complete it off line, upload and submit the completed application, including all necessary assurances and certifications, via www.grants.gov. After electronically submitting an application through the Web site, the applicant will receive an automated acknowledgement from www.grants.gov that contains a www.grants.gov tracking number. USDA Rural Development strongly recommends that applicants do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through www.grants.gov.

(c) After successful applicants are notified of the intent to make a Federal award, applicants must meet the requirements of 7 CFR 4280.122 (a) through (h) for the grant agreement to be executed.
award, borrowers must meet the conditions prior to issuance of loan note guarantee as outlined in 7 CFR 4280.142.

(3) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements combined guaranteed loan and grant application.

(a) Information for the content required for a combined guaranteed loan and grant application to be considered complete is found in 7 CFR 4280.165(c).

(b) All combined guaranteed loan and grant application applications must be submitted as hard copy to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located. A list of USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinators is available via the following link: www.rd.usda.gov/files/RBS_StateEnergyCoordinators.pdf.

(c) After successful applicants are notified of the intent to make a Federal award, applicants must meet the requirements, including the requisite forms and certifications, specified in 7 CFR 4280.117, 4280.118, 4280.119, and 4280.137, as applicable, for the issuance of a grant agreement and loan note guarantee.

(4) Energy audits or renewable development assistance grant applications.

(a) Grant applications for energy audits or renewable energy development assistance must provide the information required by 7 CFR 4280.190 to be considered a complete application.

(b) All energy audits or renewable development assistance grant applications must be submitted either as hard copy to the appropriate Rural Development Energy Coordinator in the State in which the applicant’s proposed project is located, or electronically using the Government-wide www.grants.gov Web site. Instructions for submission of the application can be found at section IV.B. of this Notice.

(c) After successful applicants are notified of the intent to make a Federal award, applicants must meet the requirements of 7 CFR 4280.195 for the grant agreement to be executed.

5. Dan and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number and System for Award Management (SAM).

All applicants, unless exempt under 2 CFR 25.110, or who have an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d), are required to:

(a) Be registered in SAM prior to submitting an application; which can be obtained at no cost via a toll-free request line at (866) 705–5711 or online at fedgov.dnb.com/webform.

(b) Provide a valid DUNS number in its application.

(c) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application under consideration by the Agency.

(d) If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements of IV.C. (1) through (3) at the time the Agency is ready to make an award, the Agency may determine the applicant is not eligible to receive the award.

C. Submission Dates and Times. Grant applications, guaranteed loan-only applications, and combined grant and guaranteed loan applications for financial assistance provided by the 2014 Farm Bill for Federal FY 2017, and for appropriated funds that REAP may receive from the appropriation for Federal FY 2017, may be submitted at any time on an ongoing basis. When an application window closes, the next application window opens on the following day. This Notice establishes the deadline dates for the applications to be received in order to be considered for funding. If an application window falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, the application package is due the next business day. An application received after these dates will be considered with other applications received in the next application window. In order to be considered for funds under this Notice, complete applications must be received by the appropriate USDA Rural Development State Office or via www.grants.gov. The deadline for applications to be received to be considered for funding in Federal FY 2017 are outlined in the following paragraphs and also summarized in a table at the end of this section:

(1) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements grant applications and combination grant and guaranteed loan applications. Application deadlines for Federal FY 2017 grant funds are:

(a) For applicants requesting $20,000 or less that wish to have their application compete for the “Grants of $20,000 or less set aside,” complete applications must be received no later than:

(i) 4:30 p.m. local time on October 31, 2016, or

(ii) 4:30 p.m. local time on March 31, 2017.

(b) For applicants requesting grant funds of over $20,000 (unrestricted) or funding for a combination grant and guaranteed loan, complete applications must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. local time on March 31, 2017.

(2) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan-only applications. Applications will be reviewed and processed when received, with periodic competitions. Applications must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. local time on January 31, 2017.

(3) Energy audits and renewable energy development assistance grant applications. Applications must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. local time on January 31, 2017.

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<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Application window opening dates</th>
<th>Application window closing dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements Grants ($20,000 or less competing for the remaining set aside funds).</td>
<td>November 1, 2016 ..........................</td>
<td>March 31, 2017 *.</td>
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*Applications received after this date will be considered for the next funding cycle in the subsequent Federal FY.
D. Intergovernmental Review: REAP is not subject to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.

E. Funding Restrictions. The following funding limitations apply to applications submitted under this Notice.

1. Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements projects.

(a) Applicants can be awarded only one renewable energy system project and one energy efficiency improvement grant in Federal FY 2017.

(b) For renewable energy system grants, the minimum grant is $2,500 and the maximum is $500,000. For energy efficiency improvements grants, the minimum grant is $1,500 and the maximum grant is $250,000.

(c) For renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements loan guarantees, the minimum REAP guaranteed loan amount is $5,000 and the maximum amount of a guaranteed loan that can be provided to a borrower is $25 million.

(d) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan and grant combination applications. Paragraphs IV.E.(1)(b) and (c) of this Notice contain the applicable maximum amounts and minimum amounts for grants and guaranteed loans. Requests for guaranteed loan and combined grant and guaranteed loan will not exceed 75 percent of eligible project costs, with any Federal grant portion not to exceed 25 percent of the total eligible project costs, whether the grant is part of a combination request or is a grant-only.

2. Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants.

(a) Applicants may submit only one energy audit grant application and one renewable energy development assistance grant application for Federal FY 2017 funds.

(b) The maximum aggregate amount of energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants awarded to any one recipient under this Notice cannot exceed $100,000 for Federal FY 2017.

(c) The 2014 Farm Bill mandates that the recipient of a grant that conducts an energy audit for an agricultural producer or a rural small business must require the agricultural producer or rural small business to pay at least 25 percent of the cost of the energy audit, which shall be retained by the eligible entity for the cost of the audit.

3. Maximum grant assistance to an entity.

For the purposes of this Notice, the maximum amount of grant assistance to an entity will not exceed $750,000 for Federal FY 2017 based on the total amount of the renewable energy system, energy efficiency improvements, energy audit, and renewable energy development assistance grants awarded to an entity under REAP.

F. Other Submission Requirements.

1. Environmental information. For the Agency to consider an application, the application must include all environmental review documents with supporting documentation in accordance with 7 CFR part 1970. Any required environmental review must be completed prior to obligation of funds or the approval of the application.

2. Energy audit and tax delinquent status. Corporate applicants submitting applications under this Notice must include Form AD 3030, “Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants.” Corporate applicants who receive an award under this Notice will be required to sign Form AD 3031, “Assurance Regarding Felony Conviction or Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants.” Both forms can be found online at www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad3030, and www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad3031.

3. Original signatures. USDA Rural Development may request that the applicant provide original signatures on forms submitted through www.grants.gov at a later date.

4. Transparency Act Reporting. All recipients of Federal financial assistance are required to report information about first-tier sub-awards and executive compensation in accordance with 2 CFR part 170. If an applicant does not have an exception under 2 CFR 170.110(b), the applicant must then ensure that they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the reporting requirements to receive funding.

5. Race, ethnicity, and gender. The Agency is requesting that each applicant provide race, ethnicity, and gender information about the applicant. The information will allow the Agency to evaluate its outreach efforts to under-served and under-represented populations. Applicants are encouraged to furnish this information with their applications, but are not required to do so. An applicant’s eligibility or the likelihood of receiving an award will not be impacted by furnishing or not furnishing this information. However, failure to furnish this information may preclude the awarding of State Director and Administrator points in Section V.C.(1) of this Notice.

V. Application Review Information

A. Criteria. In accordance with 7 CFR part 4280 subpart B, the application dates published in Section IV.C. of this Notice identify the times and dates by which complete applications must be submitted in order to compete for the funds available.

1. Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements grant applications. Complete renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements grant applications are eligible to compete in competitions as described in 7 CFR 4280.121.

(a) Complete renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements grant applications requesting $20,000 or less are eligible to compete in up to five competitions as described in 7 CFR 4280.121(b).

(b) Complete renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements grant applications requesting more than $20,000 and $750,000, are eligible to compete in up to five competitions as described in 7 CFR 4280.121.

2. Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan applications. Complete guaranteed loan applications are eligible for periodic competitions as described in 7 CFR 4280.139.

3. Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements combined guaranteed loan and grant applications. Complete combined guaranteed loan and grant applications are eligible to compete in two competitions each Federal FY—a State competition and a national competition as described in 7 CFR 4280.121(a).

4. Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grant applications. Complete energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants applications are eligible to compete in one national competition per Federal FY as described in 7 CFR 4280.193.

B. Review and Selection Process. All complete applications will be scored in accordance with 7 CFR part 4280 subpart B and this section of the Notice.

1. Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements grant applications. Renewable energy system and energy efficiency grant applications will be scored in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.120 and selections will be made in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.121. Due to the competitive nature of this program, applications are competed based on submittal date. The submittal date is the
date the Agency receives a complete application. The complete application date is the date the Agency receives the last piece of information that allows the Agency to determine eligibility and to score, rank, and compete the application for funding.

(a) Funds for renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements grants of $20,000 or less will be allocated to the States. Eligible applications must be submitted by October 31, 2016, or May 1, 2017, in order to be considered for these set-aside funds. Approximately 50 percent of these funds will be made available for those complete applications the Agency receives by October 31, 2016, and approximately 50 percent of the funds for those complete applications the Agency receives by May 1, 2017. All unused State allocated funds for grants of $20,000 or less will be pooled to the National Office.

(b) Eligible applications received by May 1, 2017, for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements grants of $20,000 or less, that are not funded by State allocations can be submitted to the National Office to compete against grant applications of $20,000 or less from other States at a national competition. Obligations of these funds will take place prior to June 30, 2017.

(c) Eligible applications for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements, regardless of the amount of the funding request, received by May 1, 2017, can compete for unrestricted grant funds. Unrestricted grant funds will be allocated to the States. All unused State allocated unrestricted grant funds will be pooled to the National Office.

(d) National unrestricted grant funds for all eligible renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements grant applications received by May 1, 2017, which include grants of $20,000 or less, that are not funded by State allocations can be submitted to the National Office to compete against grant applications from other States at a final national competition.

(2) **Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan applications.** Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements guaranteed loan applications will be scored in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.192 and selections will be made in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.193. Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants will be maintained in a reserve at the National Office. Applications received by January 31, 2017 will compete for funding at a national competition, based on the scoring criteria established under 7 CFR 4280.192, will compete for funding at a national competition.

Those applications that meet the Agency’s underwriting requirements, are credit worthy, and score a minimum of 50 points will compete in national competitions for guaranteed loan funds periodically. All unfunded eligible guaranteed loan-only applications received that do not score at least 50 points will be competed against other guaranteed loan-only applications from other States at a final national competition, if the guaranteed loan reserves have not been completely depleted, on September 1, 2017. If funds remain after the final guaranteed loan-only national competition, the Agency may elect to utilize budget authority to fund additional grant-only applications. 

(3) **Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements combined grant and guaranteed loan applications.** Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements combined grant and guaranteed loan applications will be scored in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.120 and selections will be made in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.121. Renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements combined grant and guaranteed loan applications will compete with grant-only applications for grant funds allocated to their State. If the application is ranked high enough to receive State allocated grant funds, the State will request funding for the guaranteed loan portion of any combined grant and guaranteed loan applications from the National Office guaranteed loan reserve, and no further competition will be required. All unused eligible applications for combined grant and guaranteed loan applications that are received by May 1, 2017, and that are not funded by State allocations can be submitted to the National Office to compete against other grant and combined grant and guaranteed loan applications from other States at a final national competition.

(4) **Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grant applications.** Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants will be scored in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.192 and selections will be made in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.193. Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grant funds will be maintained in a reserve at the National Office. Applications received by January 31, 2017 will compete for funding at a national competition, based on the scoring criteria established under 7 CFR 4280.192, will compete for funding at a national competition. If funds remain after the energy audit and renewable energy development assistance national competition, the Agency may elect to transfer budget authority to fund additional renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements grants from the National Office reserve after pooling.

C. **State Director and Administrator Points.** The State Director and the Administrator will take into consideration paragraphs V.C.1(1) and 2 below in the awarding of points for eligible renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvement grant applications submitted in Federal FY 2017:

(1) 7 CFR 4280.120(g)(3) may allow for applications from other States at a final national competition. If funds remain after the final guaranteed loan-only national competition, the Agency may elect to utilize budget authority to fund additional grant-only applications.

(2) 7 CFR 4280.120(g)(4) may allow for applications that further a Presidential initiative, or a Secretary of Agriculture priority to receive additional points including:

(a) Located in rural areas with the lowest incomes where, according to the most recent 5-year American Community Survey, show that at least 20 percent of the population is living in poverty. Or a project is located in a community (village, town, city, or Census Designated Place) with a median household income of 60 percent or less of the State’s non-metropolitan median household income. This will support Secretary of Agriculture’s priority of providing 20 percent of its funding to these areas of need; and

(b) Located in designated Strike Force or Promise Zone areas, which is a Secretary of Agriculture’s priority. 

D. **Other Submission Requirements.**

Grant-only applications, guaranteed loan-only applications, and combined grant and guaranteed loan applications for financial assistance may be submitted at any time. In order to be considered for funds, complete
applications must be received by the appropriate USDA Rural Development State Office in which the applicant’s proposed project is located, or via www.grants.gov, as identified in Section IV.C., of this Notice.

(1) Insufficient funds. If funds are not sufficient to fund the total amount of an application:
   (a) For State allocated funds:
      (i) The applicant must be notified that they may accept the remaining funds or submit the total request for National Office reserve funds available after pooling. If the applicant agrees to lower its grant request, the applicant must certify that the purposes of the project will be met and provide the remaining total funds needed to complete the project.
      (ii) If two or more grant or combination applications have the same score and remaining funds in the State allocation are insufficient to fully award them, the Agency will notify the applicants that they may either accept the proportional amount of funds or be notified in accordance with V.D.(1)(b)(i) or (ii), as applicable.
   (iv) At its discretion, the Agency may instead allow the remaining funds to be carried over to the next Federal FY rather than selecting a lower scoring application(s) or distributing funds on a pro-rata basis.

(2) Award considerations. All award considerations will be discretionary. In determining the amount of a renewable energy system or energy efficiency improvements grant or loan guarantee, the Agency will consider the six criteria specified in 7 CFR 4280.114(e) or 7 CFR 4280.129(g), as applicable.

(3) Notification of funding determination. As per 7 CFR 4280.111(c) all applicants will be informed in writing by the Agency as to the funding determination of the application.

VI. Federal Award Administration

A. Federal Award Notices. The Agency will award and administer renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements grants, guaranteed loans in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.122, and 7 CFR 4280.139, as applicable. The Agency will award and administer the energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.195. Notification requirements of 7 CFR 4280.111, apply to this Notice.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

(1) Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination. The Agency will ensure that equal opportunity and nondiscrimination requirements are met in accordance with the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, 15 U.S.C. 1691 et seq. and 7 CFR part 15d, Nondiscrimination in Programs and Activities Conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Agency will not discriminate against applicants on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, or age (provided that the applicant has the capacity to contract); because all or part of the applicant’s income derives from any public assistance program; or because the applicant has in good faith exercised any right under the Consumer Credit Protection Act, 15 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.

(2) Civil Rights Compliance. Recipients of grants must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq., Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq., and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794. This may include collection and maintenance of data on the race, sex, and national origin of the recipient’s membership/ownership and employees. These data must be available to conduct compliance reviews in accordance with 7 CFR 1901.204.

(3) Environmental Analysis. 7 CFR part 1970, or successor regulation outlines environmental procedures and requirements for this subpart. Prospective applicants are advised to contact the Agency to determine environmental requirements as soon as practicable after they decide to pursue any form of financial assistance directly or indirectly available through the Agency.

(4) Appeals. A person may seek a review of an Agency decision or appeal to the National Appeals Division in accordance with 7 CFR 4280.105.

(5) Reporting. Grants, guaranteed loans, combination guaranteed loans and grants, and energy audit and energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants that are awarded are required to fulfill the reporting requirements as specified in Departmental Regulations, the Grant Agreement, and in 7 CFR part 4280 subpart B and paragraphs VI.B.(5)(a) through (d) of this Notice.

(a) Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements grants that are awarded are required to fulfill the reporting requirements as specified in 7 CFR 4280.123.

(b) Guaranteed loan applications that are awarded are required to fulfill the reporting requirements as specified in 7 CFR 4280.143.

(c) Combined guaranteed loan and grant applications that are awarded are required to fulfill the reporting requirements as specified in 7 CFR 4280.165(f).

(d) Energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants grant applications that are awarded are required to fulfill the reporting requirements as specified in 7 CFR 4280.196.

VII. Federal Awarding Agency Contacts

For further information contact the applicable USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinator for your respective State, as identified via the following link: www.rd.usda.gov/files/RBS_StateEnergyCoordinators.pdf.

For information about this Notice, please contact Maureen Hessel, Business Loan and Grant Analyst, USDA Rural Development, Energy Division, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Stop 3225, Room 6866,
VIII. Other Information

A. Paperwork Reduction Act

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the information collection requirements associated with renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvements grants and guaranteed loans, as covered in this Notice, have been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under OMB Control Number 0570–0050. The information collection requirements associated with energy audit and renewable energy development assistance grants have also been approved by OMB under OMB Control Number 0570–0059.

B. Nondiscrimination Statement

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, reprisal and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, religion, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (PDF), found online at www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or complete the form at any USDA office, or call (866) 632–9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC 20250–9410, by fax (202) 690–7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities and wish to file either an EEO or program complaint, please contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877–8339 or (800) 845–6136 (in Spanish).

Persons with disabilities who wish to file a program complaint, please see information above on how to contact us directly by mail or by email. If you require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) please contact USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720–2600 (voice and TDD).

Dated: October 12, 2016.

Justin Hatmaker,
Acting Administrator, Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Dairyland Power Cooperative: Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Hold Public Scoping Meetings

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Hold Public Scoping Meetings.

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) intends to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and hold public scoping meetings in connection with possible impacts related to the Cardinal-Hickory Creek Transmission Line Project proposed by Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC). Other utilities participating in the Project are American Transmission Company LLC, by its corporate manager ATC Management Inc. and ITC Midwest LLC.

The proposal consists of the construction of a 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission line and associated infrastructure connecting the Hickory Creek Substation in Dubuque County, Iowa, with the Cardinal Substation in the Town of Middleton, Wisconsin (near Madison, Wisconsin). The Project also includes a new intermediate 345/138-kV substation near the Village of Montfort in either Grant County or Iowa County, Wisconsin. The total length of the 345-kV transmission lines associated with the proposed project will be approximately 125 miles. DPC and the other project participants have identified proposed and alternate segments and locations for transmission lines and associated facilities and for the intermediate substation. Dairyland Power Cooperative is requesting RUS to provide financing for its portion of the proposed project.

DATES: RUS will conduct four public scoping meetings in an open-house format at the following locations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 31, 2016</td>
<td>Peosta, Iowa</td>
<td>3:00–6:00 p.m</td>
<td>Peosta Community Center, 7896 Burds Road, Peosta, IA 53068.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 2016</td>
<td>Cassville, Wisconsin</td>
<td>4:00–7:00 p.m</td>
<td>Cassville Middle School Cafeteria, 715 E. Amelia Street, Cassville, WI 53006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 2016</td>
<td>Dodgeville, Wisconsin</td>
<td>4:00–7:00 p.m</td>
<td>Dodgeville Middle School Cafeteria, 951 Chapel St., Dodgeville, WI 53533.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 3, 2016</td>
<td>Middleton, Wisconsin</td>
<td>4:00–7:00 p.m</td>
<td>Madison Marriott West, 1313 John Q Hammons Dr., Middleton, WI 53562.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ADDRESS: To send comments or for further information, contact Dennis Rankin, Environmental Protection Specialist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Room 2244, Stop 1571, Washington, DC 20250–1571 Email: dennis.rankin@wdc.usda.gov Washington, DC 20250–1571.

An Alternative Evaluation Study (AES) and Macro Corridor Study (MCS), prepared by Dairyland Power Cooperative, will be presented at the public scoping meetings. The reports are available for public review at the RUS address provided in this notice and at Dairyland Power Cooperative, 3251 East Avenue, South, La Crosse, WI 54602. In addition, the reports will be available at RUS’ Web site, http://www.rd.usda.gov/publications/environmental-studies/impact-statements and at local libraries in the project area.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Preliminary proposed transmission line corridors, the siting area for the intermediate substation, and the two existing end-point substations have been identified. The EIS will address the construction, operation, and