

Notice of Availability
Final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact /
Finding of No Practicable Alternative
for the Undersea Cable Replacement from Plum Island to Orient Point for
the Plum Island Animal Disease Center
United States Department of Homeland Security
Plum Island, New York

Description: Interested parties are hereby notified that the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) has prepared a Final Environmental Assessment (EA), Final Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and Final Finding of No Practicable Alternative (FONPA) for the Proposed Action described below.

Statutory Authority: This notice is being issued to all interested parties in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the White House Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1508), DHS Management Directive 023-01, rev. 01, and DHS Instruction 023-01-002-01 rev. 01 Implementation of the NEPA. This posting also serves as a notice in accordance with Section 2(a)(2) of Executive Order 11988, *Floodplain Management* and Section 2(b) of Executive Order 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*.

Proposed Action: DHS S&T proposes to conduct activities relating to the abandonment in place of an existing undersea utility cable and the installation of a new undersea utility cable between Orient Point, New York (NY) and the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) on Plum Island, NY, located 1.5 miles northeast of Orient Point (Proposed Action).

Plum Island currently receives electrical and fiber optic communications capabilities through two existing undersea cables connecting Orient Point and Plum Island. DHS requires continued electrical and communication capabilities on Plum Island during normal operation and throughout the duration of planned PIADC closure activities (i.e., five to seven years). DHS S&T conducted an inspection of the undersea cables' conditions in 2022. The inspection determined that the oldest of the two cables, M1, has reached the end of its planned lifespan and is degrading such that it is in danger of failing. Additionally, the island lacks redundant fiber optic communication measures. Therefore, DHS S&T proposes to replace one of the existing cables (M1 or M2) with a new undersea cable to supply Plum Island with mission-critical electrical and communication capabilities and to prevent any adverse effects that a potential loss of electrical or communication services may have on required operations at PIADC.

The Final EA evaluates the potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic consequences associated with DHS S&T's proposal to abandon an existing undersea cable and install a new electric/fiber optic cable between Orient Point and Plum Island. The evaluation performed within this Final EA concludes there would be no significant adverse impact to the environment or quality of life because of implementing the Proposed Action, provided routine best management practices specified in the EA are implemented.

Tasks to facilitate the Proposed Action would occur within the Federal Emergency Management Agency's 1 percent annual chance floodplain and potentially within wetlands. These tasks include cable abandonment, upland and in-water trenching along the coastlines of Plum Island and Orient Point, and cable laying. No impacts to the long-term function of the 100-year floodplain have been identified, nor is there an increased potential for flooding either on-site or off-site. Proposed work is necessary in these coastal areas; therefore, there is no practicable alternative to working in the floodplain.

Public Review: The Draft EA, Draft FONSI, and Draft FONPA were made available for a public review from January 25, 2024, through February 24, 2024. Comments received on the Draft EA and Draft FONSI were considered and addressed in the Final EA and Final FONSI, as appropriate. No comments were received on the Draft FONPA. A complete list of comments received, and DHS responses is included in Appendix C of the Final EA.

Availability: The Final EA can be accessed online at: <https://www.dhs.gov/national-environmental-policy-act>. Printed copies of the Final EA are available at the Floyd Memorial Library at 539 1st Street, Greenport, New York 11944, and the Southold Free Library at 53705 Main Road, Southold, New York 11971.