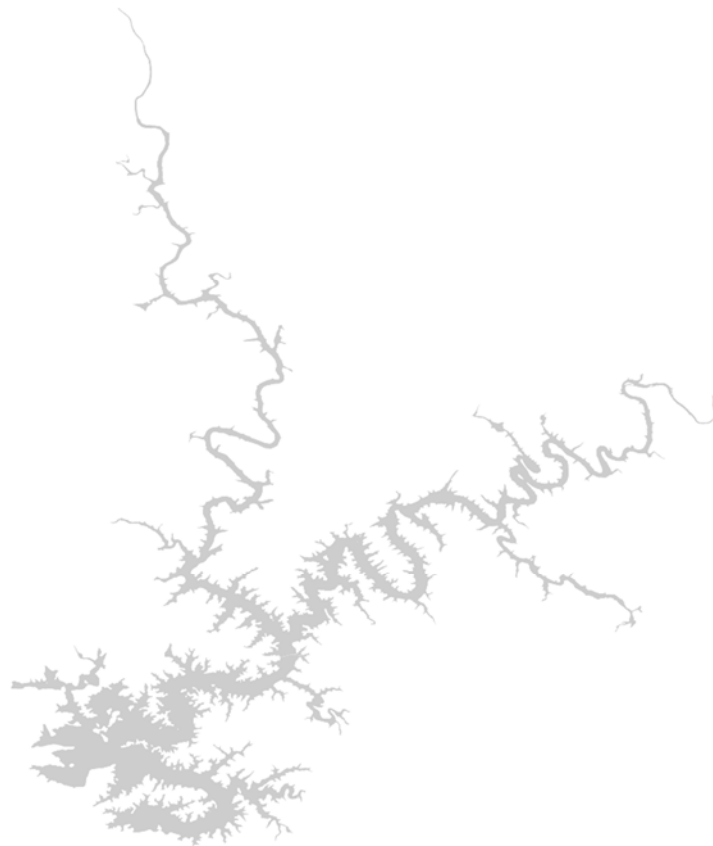




PROJECT LANDS EVALUATION STUDY PLAN

R. L. HARRIS HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT
FERC NO. 2628



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PROJECT LANDS EVALUATION STUDY PLAN

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Alabama Power Company (Alabama Power) is initiating the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing of the 135-megawatt (MW) R.L. Harris Hydroelectric Project (Harris Project), FERC Project No. 2628. The Harris Project consists of a dam, spillway, powerhouse, and those lands and waters necessary for the operation of the hydroelectric project and enhancement and protection of environmental resources. These structures, lands, and water are enclosed within the FERC Project Boundary. Under the existing Harris Project license, the FERC Project Boundary encloses two distinct geographic areas, described below.

Harris Reservoir is the 9,870-acre reservoir (Harris Reservoir) created by the R.L. Harris Dam (Harris Dam). Harris Reservoir is located on the Tallapoosa River, near Lineville, Alabama. The lands adjoining the reservoir total approximately 7,392 acres and are included in the FERC Project Boundary. This includes land to 795 feet mean sea level (msl)¹, as well as natural undeveloped areas, hunting lands, prohibited access areas, recreational areas, and all islands.



The Harris Project also contains 15,063 acres of land within the James D. Martin-Skyline Wildlife Management Area (Skyline WMA) located in Jackson County, Alabama. These lands are located approximately 110 miles north of Harris Reservoir and were acquired and incorporated into the FERC Project Boundary as part of the FERC-approved Harris Project Wildlife Mitigative Plan and Wildlife Management Plan. These lands are leased to, and managed by, the State of Alabama for wildlife management and public hunting and are part of the Skyline WMA (ADCNR 2016b).

For the purposes of this study plan, “Lake Harris” refers to the 9,870-acre reservoir, adjacent 7,392 acres of Project land, and the dam, spillway, and powerhouse. “Skyline” refers to the 15,063 acres of Project land within the Skyline WMA in Jackson County. “Harris Project” refers to all the lands, waters, and structures enclosed within the FERC Project Boundary, which includes both Lake Harris and Skyline. Harris Reservoir refers to the 9,870-acre reservoir only; Harris Dam refers to the dam, spillway, and powerhouse. The Project Area refers to the land and water in the Project Boundary and immediate geographic area adjacent to the Project Boundary (Alabama Power Company 2018).

Lake Harris and Skyline are located within two river basins: the Tallapoosa and Tennessee River Basins, respectively. The only waterbody managed by Alabama Power as part of their FERC license for the Harris Project is the Harris Reservoir.

¹ Also includes a scenic easement (to 800 feet msl or 50 horizontal feet from 793 feet msl, whichever is less, but never less than 795 feet msl).

Background and Existing Information

Alabama Power's current Harris Land Use Plan defines land use categories within the existing Project Boundary (Alabama Power 2008). Harris Project classifications are Recreational Use, Hunting, Prohibited Access, and Natural Undeveloped, as defined below.

- *Recreational Use (Public Use Areas)* – Includes lands where existing public recreation access and facilities occur and those lands set aside for future recreational use access depending on future recreation demand and needs. Within these areas, specific locations are identified as “Quasi-Public Use Areas” to provide potential use by non-profit groups, such as scouts, youth organizations, and educational groups, for outdoor recreational activities.
- *Hunting* – Includes lands that are managed to provide hunting opportunities (either through hunting leases or individual permits) as prescribed in accordance with the existing Harris Project Wildlife Mitigation Plan. Non-hunting related public access is allowed from May 1 until September 30 of each year for activities such as hiking, backpacking, camping, wildlife observation, and bank fishing opportunities.
- *Prohibited Access* – Includes lands where public use and access are prohibited to avoid hazards to the public and to prevent interference or damage to Harris Project facilities and operations (the tailrace fishing area is one exception to this use type where public access is allowed).
- *Natural Undeveloped* – Includes lands to remain in an undeveloped state to serve as protective buffer zones around public recreation areas and shoreline areas, preserve natural aesthetic qualities, prevent overcrowding, as well as to protect environmentally sensitive areas. These lands allow public access for hiking and primitive camping activities and are managed for timber production in accordance with the existing Harris Wildlife Mitigation Plan.

Additional information that will help inform this evaluation includes Alabama Power's shoreline permitting program for Harris and other Alabama Power FERC-approved Shoreline Management Plans (SMP) and Wildlife Management Programs (WMP). These documents will be used only as a reference to understanding the format and content that FERC approved.

1.1 Resource Management Goals

The FERC requires that project lands and waters be protected and maintained for their designated project purposes (as part of the Standard License Articles). In addition, hydroelectric power project licensees have an obligation to confirm that shoreline development, timber management, and wildlife management activities that occur within a project boundary are consistent with project license purposes and requirements.

1.2 Current Operations and Operational Alternatives

The Project Lands Evaluation Study Plan will involve evaluating baseline Harris Project lands information at the Harris Project. Any effects on project lands from potential changes in operations will be analyzed in the R. L. Harris Project Operating Curve Change Feasibility Analysis and the Downstream Release Alternatives Study Plans.

2.0 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The FERC is responsible for issuing licenses for the construction, operation, and maintenance of non-federal hydropower projects. Alabama Power, as Licensee, is responsible for operating and maintaining its FERC-licensed projects in accordance with the license requirements and Harris Project purposes (*i.e.*, power generation, public recreation, environmental protection, aesthetic values).

Alabama Power intends to conduct a Harris Project lands evaluation study to identify lands around Lake Harris and at Skyline that are needed for Harris Project purposes and to classify these lands. Alabama Power will also evaluate the land use classifications for Harris and determine if any changes are needed to conform to Alabama Power's current land classification system and other Alabama Power FERC-approved Shoreline Management Plans. The study will identify lands to be added to, or removed from, the current Harris Project Boundary and/or be reclassified.

Once this evaluation is complete, Alabama Power proposes to use the project lands evaluation information to develop a WMP and a SMP. Alabama Power will use the FERC guidance applicable at the time these plans are developed.

3.0 PROJECT NEXUS AND GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The proposed project lands evaluation study plan will identify lands necessary for the Harris Project. Additionally, the study plan will be used to develop a WMP and SMP, as required by FERC for hydroelectric projects under its jurisdiction.

The geographic scope for this study includes the Harris Project Boundary and the associated Project Area.

4.0 METHODS

This study is divided into two phases: Phase 1, project lands evaluation and Phase 2, developing the WMP and SMP based on the results of Phase 1. The detailed process for completing Phase 1 will be as follows:

1. Meet with Harris Action Team (HAT) 4 members to discuss potential changes to the Harris Project lands (add, delete, or reclassify). All proposed changes to the Harris Project lands will include a tract by tract description, rationale for the change, and will be presented in Geographic Information System (GIS) format.
2. All proposed land changes will consider the location of any threatened or endangered species (T&E), wetlands, and cultural resources (*i.e.*, "Sensitive Areas"), timber management tracts and current practices, and the impaired waters GIS layer developed by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). No sensitive information will be shared with the public.
3. Alabama Power will develop a draft map using GIS to show all proposed changes to Harris Project Lands.

4. Conduct a botanical inventory of a 20-acre parcel at Flat Rock Park. This botanical inventory is intended to catalogue all plants present at a 20-acre parcel at the rare Blake's Ferry Pluton located adjacent to Alabama Power Company's Flat Rock Park. Information collected during this inventory will include a description of the biological setting, inventory dates and methods, results and conclusions (including a list of all species found in the study area and their conservation status), and an assessment of the biological significance or ecological quality of the project site in a local and regional context. Investigators will include a GIS map of all state and federally listed species found in the study area.
5. Alabama Power will evaluate acreage at Skyline to determine suitability for bobwhite quail habitat.
6. Alabama Power will develop a Phase 1 Draft Project Lands Evaluation Study Report for Hat 4 review and comment.
7. Alabama Power will develop a Phase 1 Final Project Lands Evaluation Study Report for use in Phase 2.

Phase 2 - Phase 2 includes developing a SMP (Phase 2A) and a WMP (Phase 2B) to file with the final license application. In addition to the results from the Phase 1 Land Use Evaluation, Alabama Power will also integrate information collected during other relicensing studies (e.g., T&E, water quality, and recreation studies), as appropriate, to the SMP and WMP.

Phase 2A – SMP

1. Form a HAT 4 work group for persons interested in working on the SMP.
2. Review existing and develop new, if applicable, Best Management Practices (BMPs) and evaluate how these BMPs would apply to the different land classifications.
3. Review the Harris Guidelines for Shoreline Permitting; discuss potential modifications.
4. Alabama Power will incorporate information regarding northern long-eared and Indiana bats by referencing the Alabama Natural Heritage Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Alabama Ecological Services Field Office to determine locations of known maternity roost trees and hibernacula within the Project Vicinity (including determining buffer zones within a 150-foot radius of known maternity roost trees and buffer zones of 0.25 mile from known, occupied hibernacula that overlap with the Project Boundary) in order to develop provisions for regular and planned tree-removal activities (e.g., associated with timber management, shoreline management, recreation site maintenance or enhancement, etc.).
5. Incorporate the Aquatic Nuisance Vegetation and Vector Control Program into the SMP.
6. Alabama Power will develop a detailed description of existing vegetation management practices throughout the Project Area, which will include information on such practices at the project recreation sites, access roads, transmission line rights-of-way, and other project facilities. Additionally, information about the goals, objectives, and methods (e.g., manual, mechanical, or chemical treatments, regular plantings) used in each area, frequency of treatments, and any monitoring that is conducted will be compiled and included in the Final Project Lands Evaluation Study Report.
7. Include existing Alabama Power policies for the Harris Project (i.e., dredging, primitive camping);

8. Incorporate results of the botanical inventory of a 20-acre parcel at Flat Rock Park (Inventory completed by February 2020) into the Draft SMP.
9. Develop a Draft SMP to file with the final license application (see Section 5.0).

Phase 2B - WMP

1. Form a HAT 4 work group for persons interested in working on the WMP. This HAT will likely include agency representatives from Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), ADEM, USFWS, and other interested groups/individuals.
2. In preparation for facilitated meetings, Alabama Power will prepare GIS overlays that depict the following:
 - lands within the Project Boundary and current land use classifications for those lands (from Phase 1);
 - forest stand data showing cover type, composition, and age of forest stands within the Project Boundary;
 - current timber management objectives and any existing BMPs;
 - locations of known populations of T&E species; Alabama Power will incorporate information regarding northern long-eared and Indiana bats by referencing the Alabama Natural Heritage Program and the USFWS Alabama Ecological Services Field Office to determine locations of known maternity roost trees and hibernacula within the Project Vicinity (including determining buffer zones within a 150-foot radius of known maternity roost trees and buffer zones of 0.25 mile from known, occupied hibernacula that overlap with the Project Boundary) in order to develop provisions for regular and planned tree-removal activities (e.g., associated with timber management, shoreline management, recreation site maintenance or enhancement, etc.);
 - acreage at Skyline that may be suitable for bobwhite quail habitat (if such habitat exists);
 - impaired waters list; and
 - characterization and composition of riparian, wetland, and littoral habitats within the Project Boundary.

This information will provide the basis of knowledge for discussions about management goals to enhance wildlife resources at the Harris Project

3. Alabama Power will facilitate HAT 4 work group meetings to collaborate on developing a WMP using information obtained during this study.
4. Develop provisions for regular and planned tree-removal activities (e.g., associated with timber management, shoreline management, recreation site maintenance or enhancement, etc.).
5. Develop a WMP to file with the license application (see Section 5.0).

5.0 REPORTS

As the various components of this study are completed and available for review and comment, Alabama Power will share results with HAT 4 through written documentation and stakeholder meetings, as discussed in Section 2.0 of the PAD. Stakeholders will have between 7-30 days to review and comment on documents, depending on the document length and complexity. Additional meetings (in-person and via conference call) will be held as necessary to discuss study results and solicit stakeholder input. Draft and final reports, if applicable to the study, will be filed

with FERC as well as provided to the HAT members and posted to the Harris relicensing website for access by the general public.

As part of the Integrated Licensing Process (ILP), FERC requires licensees to file two status reports: the Initial Study Report and Updated Study Report. These reports provide a status update on all the FERC-approved relicensing studies. Alabama Power will prepare these FERC reports per the requirements of 18 CFR 5.15(c) and (f).

While not required in FERC’s ILP process, Alabama Power will also file two Progress Updates during the relicensing process to provide additional updates to FERC, stakeholders, and the general public on the status of the relicensing studies, any interim work products, and any draft and final reports issued. The Progress Update will also include HAT meeting summaries. The first Progress Update will be distributed (and filed with FERC) in October 2019, approximately six months prior to the Initial Study Report; the second update will be distributed (and filed with FERC) in October 2020, approximately six months prior to the Updated Study Report.

6.0 SCHEDULE

This schedule corresponds to the FERC-approved Harris Project Process Plan and Schedule. Consultation meeting dates will be finalized with HAT 4 members upon FERC approval of the study plan.

FERC Study Plan Determination	April 2019
Flat Rock Botanical Inventory	March 2019-December 2019
Phase 1 - Develop GIS Overlays and Maps	April 2019 – September 2019
HAT 4 meeting on Project Lands Proposal (and GIS)	August/September 2019
Progress Update	October 2019
Flat Rock Botanical Inventory Final Report	March 2020
Phase 2 A – SMP	2020 – 2021
Phase 2 B – WMP	2020 – 2021
Initial Study Report	April 2020
Initial Study Report Meeting	April 2020
Consultation with HAT 4	May 2020 – November 2021 ²
Progress Update	October 2020
Updated Study Report	April 2021
Updated Study Report Meeting	April 2021
File Preliminary Licensing Proposal	By July 3, 2021
File Final License Application with FERC	November 2021

7.0 COST AND EFFORT

Alabama Power estimates the cost to consult on and implement this study plan, including costs for completing Phase 1 and Phase 2A and 2B tasks, is \$200K.

² Meeting dates will be determined with HAT 4 members to develop the SMP and WMP in Phases 2A and 2B.

8.0 REFERENCES

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR). 2016b. Wildlife Management Areas. Available at: <http://www.outdooralabama.com/wildlife-management-areas>. Accessed November 2016.

Alabama Power Company. 2008. 1995 Land Use Plan for the R.L. Harris Project (Revised 2008) submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission by Alabama Power Company, on June 30, 2008. Alabama Power Company, Birmingham, AL.

Alabama Power Company. 2018. Pre-Application Document for the Harris Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2628). Alabama Power Company, Birmingham, AL.