SAINT JOHN'S ABBEY

Saint John's
UNIVERSITY

February 10, 2010

Mr. David Birkholz
Energy Planning Permitting
MN Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 500
St. Paul, MN 55101-2198

Subject: CapX2020 - St. Cloud to Fargo Line – TL-09-1056

Dear Mr. Birkholz,

Saint John's Abbey and University recently completed their 150th anniversary. With such a long history on nearly 3,000 acres of land in central Minnesota, we have a strong "sense of place", where over 150 monks live and work. Saint John's University has nearly 2,000 students and hundreds of employees. Saint John's and the surrounding Avon Hills serve as an "oasis of green" for this whole area.

We are concerned about the effect that a 345 kV transmission line with its 175 foot towers would have on the natural and cultural resources of our area. Frankly, we are also concerned with how it would affect our business of recruiting and educating students. One of the most common reasons given by students for choosing this University is the unspoiled rural setting.

Wherever transmission lines as large as these go, they will visually disrupt the lives of those living and working nearby. Like anyone who would be negatively affected by such towers, Saint John's Abbey and University does not want the disruption or land use changes associated with the proposed CapX2020 St. Cloud to Fargo power line.

We are also well aware that all of us here contribute to the need for electric power and transmission. As such, we also understand that we cannot negate the need for transmission simply because we do not like the idea of tall towers in a natural landscape. We do believe that every effort should be made to minimize the disruption to the landscape and the lives of those who will live in their shadow. Selecting the final location will certainly cause severe personal and business disruptions for those nearby.

Since January 2008, Saint John's has been active in asking whether the power line was needed at all, including hosting a conference on the CapX2020 proposal. Saint John's has also taken steps to reduce our need for outside power by installing the largest (400kw) photovoltaic field in the Midwest.

Given that every place the line goes will have an impact; Saint John's has the following environmental and cultural issues that should be included in the site location decision process:

Saint John's owns 2,740 acres and encompasses several hundred acres of public water. The campus uses only 100 acres and the rest is forest, wetlands, prairies, and lakes.

- This is the largest contiguous block of public or private land by a single landowner in Stearns County and provides unique habitat for species needing large blocks.
- Saint John's is a State Game Refuge and has been for 70 years.
- The majority of Saint John's property is listed on the MN DNR County Biological Survey as high quality, intact ecosystems of mesic oak and maple-basswood. There are over a dozen specific locations of rare and/or species of special concern. These include cerulean warbler nesting sites and red-shouldered hawks, among others.
- Our lands and forests are inspected annually by the Forest Stewardship Council and we have been certified since 2002 in the highest category of "well-managed" forests.
- The campus is the home of a collection of historic buildings which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The campus is also home to numerous buildings designed by world famous architect, Marcel Breuer, including the famous Abbey Church and Bell Banner.
- The miles of hiking and ski trails at Saint John's are heavily used and are used by the public as well as students and staff.
- In 2007, the Audubon Society named the Avon Hills area, including all of Saint John's as an "Important Bird Area" in Minnesota. http://mn.audubon.org/birds-science-education/important-bird-areas/ibas-minnesota The remaining natural habitats are very important in what is otherwise a largely human-dominated and disturbed landscape.

If a 345 kV transmission line were to come through Saint John's property, we would recommend in the strongest language possible that it be buried through this and other such unique environmental areas. Any buried transmission line through Saint John's must also follow existing open landscapes north of I-94. We believe it would be a travesty to cut a swath through one of the best remaining hardwood forests in central Minnesota.

Please advise us if we can be of further assistance.

Respectfully,

Benedict Leuthner, OSB
Treasurer
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Enclosures

Cc: Abbot John Klassen, OSB
President Bob Koopmann, OSB
Thomas Kroll – Land Manager