



In the Matter of the Application for a HVTL  
Route Permit for the Little Falls 115 kV  
Transmission Project.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
SCOPING DECISION DOCUMENT  
PUC DOCKET NO. ET-2, E015/TL-11-318**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The above matter has come before the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Commerce (Department) for a decision on the scope of the environmental assessment (EA) to be prepared on the Little Falls 115 kV Transmission Project proposed by Great River Energy (GRE) and Minnesota Power.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Project, as proposed by the Applicants, would provide an additional power delivery source to rural areas east of Little Falls. As proposed by Applicants, the Project totals approximately 4.35 miles of transmission line and includes the following components:

- GRE would assume ownership of a 0.51 mile segment of Minnesota Power's Transmission Line 46 and construct approximately 3.84 miles of new overhead 115 kV transmission line between Minnesota Power's Little Falls Substation and Crow Wing Power's Little Falls Substation. The first 0.51 miles of this component would rebuild Minnesota Power's existing 46 115 kV transmission line.
- Construction of a new 0.51 mile 115 kV transmission line to reconnect Minnesota Power's Transmission Line 46 with the Minnesota Power Little Falls Substation.
- Modifications to the Minnesota Power Little Falls Substation to accommodate new 115 kV sources.
- Expansion and modification of Crow Wing Power's Little Falls Substation.

The Project is located east of Little Falls in Little Falls Township of Morrison County. The Applicants request a route width of 300 feet, within which a right-of-way of 100 to 120 feet would be located. GRE proposes using single pole structures with a height of approximately 60 to 85 feet and spans of approximately 300 to 400 feet between poles for the majority of the route length. Minnesota Power proposes to use H-frame structures with a height of approximately 60 to 80 feet for its 0.51 mile segment.

The Applicants anticipate beginning construction in mid-2012, with an in-service date of November, 2012. The Project is expected to cost approximately \$2.8 million dollars.

## **PURPOSE**

GRE and Minnesota Power state in their route permit application that the proposed project is intended to provide an additional power delivery source to rural areas east of Little Falls.

## **REGULATORY BACKGROUND**

A high-voltage transmission line route permit application for the project was filed by GRE and Minnesota Power on June 16, 2011, and accepted by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) on August 8, 2011. The route permit will be reviewed under the alternative review process, pursuant to the Power Plant Siting Act (Minnesota Statutes 216E) and Minnesota Rules 7850.2800 to 7850.3900. Under the alternative permitting process, the Commission has six months from the date the application was accepted as complete to make a decision on the route permit.

## **SCOPING PROCESS**

Scoping is the first step in the process after application acceptance. The scoping process has two primary purposes: 1) to ensure that the public has a chance to participate in determining what routes and issues are studied in the EA, and 2) to help focus the EA on the most important issues surrounding the route permit decision. This scope identifies potential human and environmental issues that will be addressed in the EA. The scope also presents an anticipated schedule of the environmental review process.

### **Public Scoping Meeting**

The Department's Energy Facility Permitting (EFP) staff held a public information and environmental assessment scoping meeting on September 7, 2011, at the Little Falls Township Hall near Little Falls, Minnesota. The meeting provided members of the public an opportunity to learn about the proposed project and the state's high-voltage transmission line route permitting process, review the applicant's route permit application, ask questions, provide comments, and identify potential impacts and route alternatives to be considered in the scope of the environmental assessment. Approximately seven members of the public attended the meeting.

A court reporter was present at the public meeting and transcribed questions asked and comments made by the public, as well as responses from EFP staff, GRE and Minnesota Power. In total, two people provided oral comments and/or asked questions about the proposed project. Topics and issues raised by the public at the meeting included: the selection of the proposed route, number of poles and spans between poles, and the start and duration of Project construction.<sup>1</sup>

### **Public Comments**

A public comment period, ending on September 23, 2011, provided the public an opportunity to submit comments to EFP staff via e-mail, fax, U.S. Mail or online on issues and alternative routes

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<sup>1</sup> Public Information and Environmental Scoping Meeting Comments, eDocket Id. 201110-66937.

and alignments for consideration in the scope of the EA. Four comment letters were received by the close of the comment period:<sup>2</sup>

- The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) submitted a comment letter identifying concerns with Blanding’s Turtles, the location of bird flight diverters, and impacts and mitigation to wetlands.
- The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency submitted comments concerning possible impacts from the Project to water quality, specifically the Platte River.
- The Minnesota Department of Transportation submitted comments requesting that they be informed and consulted regarding potential impacts to MnDOT rights-of-way, particularly with the improvements to Crow Wing Power’s Little Falls Substation.
- Great River Energy submitted a comment clarifying that the Project includes improvements to Crow Wing Power’s Little Falls Substation, as well as the Minnesota Power Little Falls Substation.

None of the letters proposed alternative routes or route segments.

The scoping meeting comment report and each comment letter are available for viewing and downloading on the project website maintained by the Commission at: <http://energyfacilities.puc.state.mn.us/Docket.html?Id=32098> or on the eDockets website at: <https://edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/search.jsp>, select “11” for Year and “318” for Number.

## **MATTERS TO BE ADDRESSED**

Having reviewed the matter, consulted with EFP staff, and in accordance with Minnesota Rule 7850.3700, I hereby make the following scoping decision:

The issues outlined below will be identified and described in the environmental assessment for the proposed Little Falls 115 kV Transmission Project. The assessment will describe the project and current setting of the proposed project area. It will also provide information on the potential impacts the proposed project could have as they relate to the topics outlined in this scoping decision document, including possible mitigation for identified impacts, identification of irretrievable commitment of resources and permits from other government entities that may be required.

### **I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL**

- A. Project Description
- B. Purpose of the Transmission Line
- C. Project Location
- D. Route Description

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<sup>2</sup> Environmental Assessment Scoping Comments. eDocket Id. 201110-66934.

1. Route Width
  2. Right-of-Way
- E. Project Cost

**II. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

- A. Certificate of Need
- B. High-Voltage Transmission Line Route Permits
- C. Environmental Review Process

**III. ENGINEERING AND OPERATION DESIGN**

- A. Transmission Line Conductors
- B. Transmission Line Structures
- C. Substations

**IV. CONSTRUCTION**

- A. Transmission Line and Structures
- B. Substations
- C. Restoration and Cleanup
- D. Operation and Maintenance
- E. Property/Right-of-Way Acquisition and Displacement

**V. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, POTENTIAL IMPACTS, AND MITIGATIVE MEASURES**

- A. Environmental Setting
- B. Socioeconomic and Cultural Setting
- C. Human Settlement
  1. Noise
  2. Aesthetics ( including existing trees and right-of-way clearing, pole heights, substation)
  3. Existing Utilities (pipelines, propane tanks, septic systems)
  4. Property Values
- D. Public Health and Safety
  1. Electric and Magnetic Fields
  2. Implantable Medical Devices
  3. Stray Voltage
  4. Air Quality Associated with the Transmission Facility
- E. Recreation
  1. Parks (city, county, regional, state, and federal)
  2. Trails
- F. Transportation and Public Services
  1. Roads and Highways
  2. Emergency Services

- 3. Airports
- G. Interference
  - 1. Radio (AM/FM and Short-wave)
  - 2. Television (satellite and digital)
  - 3. Global Positioning Devices
  - 4. Cellular Phone
  - 5. Wireless Internet
- H. Archaeological and Historic Resources
- I. Land Use (land-based economies)
  - 1. Mining
  - 2. Commercial
  - 3. Tourism
  - 4. Agriculture
  - 5. Forestry
- J. Zoning and Land Use Compatibility/ State and Local Government Planning
  - 1. Residential
  - 2. Shoreland
- K. Water Resources
  - 1. Lakes, Creeks, Streams, Rivers, and Other Waterways
  - 2. Wetlands (including description and function)
  - 3. Riparian Areas
  - 4. Floodplains
- L. Soil and Groundwater
- M. Flora and Fauna
  - 1. Wildlife Management Areas
  - 2. Scientific and Natural Areas
  - 3. State, Federal, and Regional Parks and Forests
  - 4. Avian Line Markers/Diverters
  - 5. Vegetation Removal
- N. Threatened/Endangered/Rare and Unique Natural Resources

## **VI. ALTERNATIVE ROUTES TO BE EVALUATED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

The Environmental Assessment will not evaluate any routes in addition to the Proposed Route identified in GRE and Minnesota Power's Application.

## **VII. IDENTIFICATION OF PERMITS**

The environmental assessment will include a list and description of permits from other government entities that may be required for the proposed project.

### ISSUES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The scope of the Little Falls 115 kV Transmission Project EA will not consider the following:

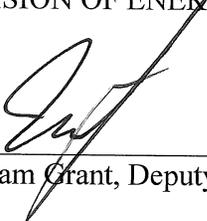
- A. No-build alternative.
- B. Issues related to project need, size, type, or timing.
- C. Any route or substation alternatives not specifically identified in this scoping decision document.
- D. Policy issues surrounding whether utilities or local government should be liable for the cost to relocate utility poles when roadways are widened.
- E. The manner in which land owners are paid for transmission rights-of-way easements, as that is outside the jurisdiction of the Commission.

### SCHEDULE

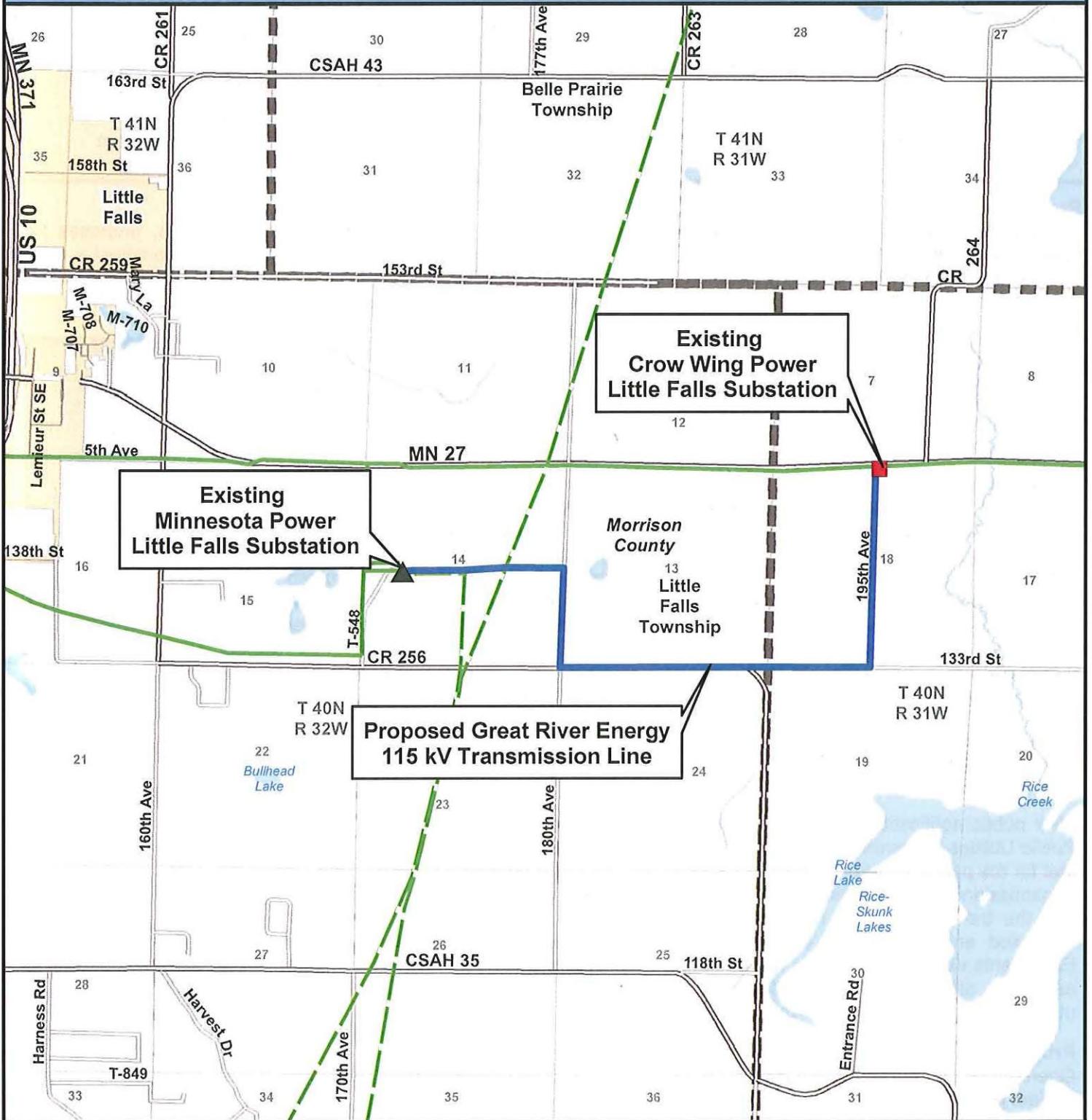
The environmental assessment shall be completed and available in November 2011. A public hearing will be held in the Little Falls area after the environmental assessment has been issued and notice served.

Signed this 5<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2011

STATE OF MINNESOTA  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
DIVISION OF ENERGY RESOURCES

  
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William Grant, Deputy Commissioner

# Project Map



**Crow Wing Power**

■ Existing Distribution Sub

**Great River Energy**

— Proposed 115 kV Transmission Line

— Existing Single Circuit 69 kV Transmission Line

**Minnesota Power**

▲ Transmission Substation

— 34.5 kV Transmission Line

— 115 kV AC Transmission Line



**GREAT RIVER ENERGY**

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative



Date last revised: 11/23/2010