

# Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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May 4, 2012

Ray Kirsch, State Permit Manager  
Minnesota Department of Commerce  
85 7<sup>th</sup> Place East, Suite 500  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101-2198

Re: Route Permit Application for the Black Dog to Savage 115 kV Transmission Line Project  
[PUC Docket Number: E002/TL-11-795]

Dear Mr. Kirsch:

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has reviewed the Route Permit Application for the Black Dog to Savage 115 kV Transmission Line Project and provides the following comments.

The DNR previously met with Xcel Energy and discussed the proposed project. The DNR appreciates communication efforts made by Xcel Energy to discuss route corridor options and natural resource effects early in the planning phases. Discussions included the Alternative Route Segment discussed in the Route Permit Application and concerns relating to Minnesota County Biological Sites of Biodiversity (MCBS), avian impacts, native plant communities, and potential impacts to calcareous fens.

Section 5.0 Engineering and Operational Design: As detailed in the Route Permit Application, 51% of the route crosses wetlands and/or waterbodies. Given the location of the project, there should be a more detailed discussion on potential impacts, avoidance and mitigative measures. Standard language is included in the Route Permit, which does not seem appropriate for this scenario. The project developer also mentions that construction is anticipated to begin in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2012. If this indicates a fall or winter construction schedule, construction during frozen conditions and outside of the avian nesting and migration seasons may reduce natural resource impacts. If these measures are proposed, it should be stated in project documents.

Vegetation removal and maintenance practices are not discussed in detail. In areas where vegetation removal is required for construction or maintenance purposes, the DNR recommends Xcel Energy practice selective vegetation removal based on safety, height and type of vegetation growing in the ROW. Maintenance should also follow the recommendation of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) where appropriate.

The project is a rebuild of an older line, but will be in a new corridor and will use new structures. There does not appear to be discussion on removal of the old poles and lines and how removal will be incorporated into the construction schedule. Lines and old structures that will be retired due to this project should be removed soon following decommission. Once the utility line is retired, if it is located in a DNR public water, then the pole is considered a structure. A DNR Work in Public Waters permit would therefore be needed. The applicant would be required to provide an explanation for the need for the structures to be left in place.

Restoration practices should include a discussion of invasive species management. The USFWS manages a large portion of the project area. Any applicable USFWS restoration guidelines or requirements should be referenced.



The DNR encourages placement of new poles outside of open water areas to the extent possible.

Xcel Energy has proposed to place bird diverters along segments of the line east of Interstate 35E. The DNR supports placement of bird diverters in this area. Xcel Energy also states that outside of this area, the transmission line will be located within the cover of trees. The DNR recommends placement of bird diverters in areas outside of the proposed 35E alignment if it is discovered during future planning or during construction, that trees are not located adjacent to the transmission line or of adequate height to divert avian flights.

The DNR appreciates the inclusion of information and DNR recommendations as they pertain to Rare, Unique, or Ecologically Sensitive Features.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the Black Dog to Savage Transmission Project. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Jamie Schrenzel  
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Environmental Review Unit  
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