

Appendix Q

USFWS and DOE Section 7 Consultation



Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

October 2, 2015

Lisa Mandell
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4101 American Blvd. East
Bloomington, MN 55425

SUBJECT: Request for Consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for the Great Northern Transmission Line Project

Dear Ms. Mandell:

The Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability is responding to an application by Minnesota Power (Applicant) for a Presidential permit to construct, operate, maintain, and connect the proposed Great Northern Transmission Line (GNTL) Project. Enclosed is a Biological Assessment (BA) to initiate formal consultation under Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The BA has been prepared in accordance with the legal requirements set forth under regulations implementing Section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act (50 CFR 402; 16 U.S.C. 1536(c)). The description of the proposed GNTL Project in Section 2.0 includes measures and best management practices that would help avoid impacts on these species, including time of year restrictions, survey commitments prior to vegetation management actions (e.g., clearing), and avoidance of habitat. Section 6.0 of the BA provides a comprehensive analysis of impacts.

The DOE prepared the enclosed BA in support of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of potential environmental impacts related to the proposed GNTL Project. This environmental review is also being conducted jointly with the state of Minnesota Department of Commerce – Energy and Environmental Regulatory Analysis (DOC-EERA) under the Minnesota Power Plan Siting Act (PPSA) in support of the Minnesota Public Utility's Commission Route Permit decision.

As described in the enclosed BA, the proposed GNTL Project would have no effect on the Poweshiek skipperling (*Oarisma Poweshiek*), piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), or the western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*). In addition, the proposed GNTL Project may affect but is unlikely to adversely affect the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), and Sprague's pipit (*Anthus spragueii*). However, the proposed GNTL Project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), as well as may affect, and is likely to adversely affect critical habitat designated for the Northern long-eared bat and gray wolf. Therefore, DOE requests formal consultation under Section 7 of the ESA be initiated at this time.

Please feel free to contact me at any time either by email at Juliea.Smith@hq.doe.gov or by phone at (202) 586-7668.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie A. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Ann Smith, PhD
Principal NEPA Document Manager
National Electricity Delivery Division, OE-20
Office of Electricity Delivery and
Energy Reliability
U.S. Department of Energy

Attch:

- GNTL Biological Assessment



Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

5 November 2014

Tony Sullins, Chief
Endangered Species Program
Midwest Region Ecological Services Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458

SUBJECT: Proposed Great Northern Transmission Line Project

Dear Mr. Sullins:

The purpose of this letter is to initiate informal consultation under Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the proposed Great Northern Transmission Line (GNTL) Project. On April 15, 2014, Minnesota Power applied to DOE's Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability for a Presidential permit proposes to construct, operate, maintain, and connect a 220-mile, overhead, single-circuit 500 kV AC transmission line between the Minnesota-Manitoba border crossing northwest of Roseau, Minnesota, and the existing Blackberry 230/115 kV Substation near Grand Rapids, Minnesota. The Minnesota Power's proposal also includes associated substation facilities and transmission system modifications at the Blackberry Substation site, and construction of a new 500 kV Series Compensation Station (a structure which will house the 500 kV series capacitor banks necessary for reliable operation and performance of the proposed transmission line). A new Blackberry 500 kV Substation would be required for the proposed GNTL Project and would be constructed adjacent to and east of the existing Blackberry 230/115 kV Substation. The proposed GNTL Project would carry hydropower generated by facilities operated by Manitoba Hydro, a Canadian electric utility, and would support the regional electric grid.

DOE has determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is the appropriate level of review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for this proposed project, as was documented in our *Federal Register* Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS on June 27, 2014 (79 FR 36493), with an open public scoping period ending on August 11, 2014. The proposed federal action is the potential grant of a Presidential permit for the international border crossing. The proposed construction, operation, maintenance, and connection of the portion of the transmission line within the United States is a connected action to DOE's proposed action. DOE will analyze potential environmental impacts from the proposed federal action and the connected action in the EIS. The NOI, along with background information, an opportunity to subscribe to our mailing list, and more, are available at <http://www.GreatNorthernEIS.org>.

The Great Northern Transmission Line Presidential permit application (OE Docket PP-398), including associated maps, drawings, and initial threatened and endangered species identification study, can also be viewed or downloaded in its entirety from the DOE Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability (OE) program Web site at: <http://energy.gov/oe/downloads/application-presidential-permit-oe-docket-no-pp-398-great-northern-transmission-line>.

In preparation of their Presidential permit, Minnesota Power collected unique and protected species information from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS), Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, USGS Gap Analysis Program (GAP) analysis, and other sources to identify habitats and species that could occur within or near the Study Area. The threatened and endangered species (including protected and candidate species) under the jurisdiction of the USFWS that are potentially located in the GNTL Project area include, but may not be limited to:

1. Canada lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*)
2. Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*)
3. Western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*)
4. Sprague's pipit (*Anthus spragueii*)
5. Dakota skipper (*Hesperia dacotae*)
6. Poweshiek skipperling (*Oarisma poweshiek*)
7. Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*)

We would very much appreciate USFWS Endangered Species Program's review and approval of the above-listed potentially affected species, or request that your program provide DOE with a list of additional protected species that might be affected and any concerns relative to potential impacts of the proposed GNTL Project on federally-listed species.

DOE has also been engaged with the USFWS Twin Cities Field Office staff, and the field office is acting as a cooperating agency in the development of the EIS. We look forward to hearing from your office and to working with you and USFWS staff with regard to the proposed GNTL Project. Please feel free to contact me at any time either by e-mail at Juliea.Smith@hq.doe.gov or by phone at (202) 586-7668.

Yours very truly,



Julie Ann Smith, PhD
Principal NEPA Document Manager
National Electricity Delivery Division, OE-20
Office of Electricity Delivery and
Energy Reliability
U.S. Department of Energy

Cc:
Lisa Mandell, USFWS
Margaret Rheude, USFWS
Brian Mills, DOE NEPA Compliance Officer