

August 13, 2014

Re: Great Northern Transmission Line Project Proposal public comment
PUC Docket Numbers: E002/TL-14-21

My name is Darin Heller and I am a constituent of the state of Minnesota and a local landowner in the Roseau area that will be significantly affected by the Great Northern Transmission Line Project (GNTLP). I am commenting on the proposed route specifically in the Roseau MN/Dieter Township area.

While I am a proponent of increasing non-polluting energy sources such as hydro, wind, solar and natural gas and am pleased to see Minnesota Power finally working towards these goals, it must be done in a manner compliant with the law and all of the factors that are the least intrusive to a) Human Settlement – displacement, noise, aesthetics, cultural values, recreation and public service. b) Public health and safety. c) Economy-agricultural, forestry, tourism and mining. c) Archeology and historical resources d) Natural Environment – air, water, plants animals.

In respect to the proposed route, specifically where it crosses the United States border and through Dieter Township of Roseau County, several of these factors have not been taken into consideration. It is obvious to even the most novice observer that the proposed route is a path of least resistance for the constructor and not the route that has the least amount of impact that would comply with the requirements. If approved, the power of eminent domain for the taking of private, inhabited, flat, and open lands for this project provides an easy-out for Minnesota Power when in fact there are significant areas of uninhabited vacant land on the Canadian side and on the actual border that would pose significantly less intrusion and are much more suitable for a project of this size.

- a) Human settlement- An aerial print-out of the area shows vast uninhabited lands on the Canadian side and also along the border. The border has a pre-cut swath of land that goes east all the way to Lake of the Woods. It makes no sense then to cross inhabited private lands when there are significant alternatives in close proximity. See exhibit 1.
- b) Use of existing right-of-way - There is already a large power -line that crosses the border just east of Roseau that I believe brings electricity from Manitoba Hydro to the U.S. This should be the first area of consideration as it appears the proposed line will run almost parallel with the existing one. Unless absolutely necessary, do we as Minnesotans desire these enormous high voltage power lines criss-crossing all over the place instead of utilizing the least intrusive current right-of-ways as required by law? Exhibit 2a and 2b

- c) Public health and safety- Utilizing a route that is in least proximity to any human habitation is always the safest route. The general open and inhabited area of Dieter Township is prone to inclement weather patterns, high wind, freezing rain that could create significant safety concerns. Many power lines in the area collapsed due to freezing rain just two years ago. Many poles were replaced. The entire citizenry of the area will be in danger in the event the same thing happens to the proposed power line.

Another safety issue is the proximity to the Piney Pinecreek Border Airport. This airport is for small aircraft, and the power lines of the size proposed could be a real safety risk for all aircraft landing irrespective of the east/west runway addition.

- d) Natural environment- The proposed route runs adjacent to a Crown Jewel of the State of Minnesota: The Roseau River Wildlife Management Area and Refuge. The disruption to this ecosystem and aesthetic degradation is highly unnecessary by bringing the route east across Canada before dropping in to the US. Here are some facts about the significance of this public land: *Roseau River WMA / Lost River State Forest Description: Just south of the Canadian border in northwestern Minnesota you'll find the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area (WMA). This 74,784-acre WMA encompasses a wide variety of habitats, including but not limited to forest, brushland, emergent wetland and open water. The vast wetlands provide some of the most spectacular waterfowl breeding and migration sites in the state. "A river runs through it," aptly describes the Roseau River flowing west for 14 miles through this WMA. Three wetland impoundments (pools) totaling more than 10,000 acres have been constructed north of the river. These wetlands are managed for resident and migratory waterfowl, wetland wildlife, hunting and other recreation. This part of the Glacial Lake Agassiz plain is low and flat. Vegetation is primarily sedge meadow, shallow wetland and lowland brush. Some of the plants you might see here include swamp milkweed, blazing star, dogwood, hardstem bulrush, bearberry, fringed gentian, big bluestem, bladderwort, bracken fern, balsam willow, narrow-leaved cattail and water hemlock. Much of the site is inaccessible, however, for one week in late July and during weekends throughout August, the 29-mile "Wildlife Drive" is open, providing vehicle access to the WMA dike system. The drive traverses wetland, woods, brushland and farm habitat, allowing visitors ample opportunity for wildlife viewing. East of the WMA and also bordering Manitoba, Canada, is the Lost River State Forest. Tamarack/black spruce forest, noted for its high densities of great gray owls, dominates the forest cover. In addition, Lost River has aspen, bur oak, jack pine and white cedar trees, a peat bog and willow and alder thickets that combine to provide ideal living accommodations for many species of northern wildlife. Roseau River WMA and Lost River State Forest are two of 45 sites along the Pine to Prairie Birding Trail. The route is about 200 miles in length and offers an array of landscapes with a checklist of more than 275 bird species. Wildlife to Watch: Roseau River is an important refuge for migrating sandhill cranes, swans and shorebirds. A total of 149 bird species breed in the vicinity, including trumpeter swans, western grebes, northern harriers, sharp-tailed grouse, marbled godwits, gray jays, black-billed magpies*

and boreal chickadees. This is the only nesting spot in Minnesota for the horned grebe. Check for shorebirds, such as greater yellowlegs, scurrying along the water's edge. On early summer evenings, listen for the unique calls and look for secretive marsh birds like the Virginia rail and American bittern. This takes persistence and patience, but a sighting will be sure to thrill. Other birds calling the woods of Lost River State Forest home include spruce grouse, whip-poor-wills, three-toed and black-backed woodpeckers, yellow-bellied flycatchers, common ravens and boreal chickadees. It's a great place for warblers too — you might get a glimpse of magnolia, mourning, Cape May, Connecticut, blackburnian and bay-breasted warblers. White-winged crossbills and other winter finches could also be spotted. Northern Minnesota is a renowned hotspot for owls. Summer discoveries may include a barred, great horned, eastern screech, long-eared, short-eared or boreal owl. In addition to great gray owls, exploring this site in winter might produce sightings of snowy, northern hawk and northern saw-whet owls. White-tailed deer are often seen. During a visit, you may see Franklin's ground squirrels, red squirrels, raccoons, porcupine, snowshoe hare or even a fisher, gray wolf, black bear or moose.

Lastly I would like to point out that while MN Power is promoting the fact they have held numerous informational meetings with landowners and have done considerable amount of educating, the fact is the notices I have received have either been with very short notice, a day or two, or the meeting was already done.

It is also important to note that the local landowners who will be affected are not publicly traded companies with an army of people to do all the leg-work and engineer an alternative route for MN Power. We are also not a governmental body with resources to work on this full-time as we are all working in our respective fields being contributing members of society.

We are relying on our elected officials and laws and regulations that are in place to protect us from the unnecessary taking of our private lands with a formidable intrusion such as this power line unless it is for the public good and there are absolutely no other alternatives. It is very obvious even to the novice observer that the proposed route across the border and through Dieter Township is only a more "convenient" route that will significantly and adversely impact the residents and wildlife of the area.

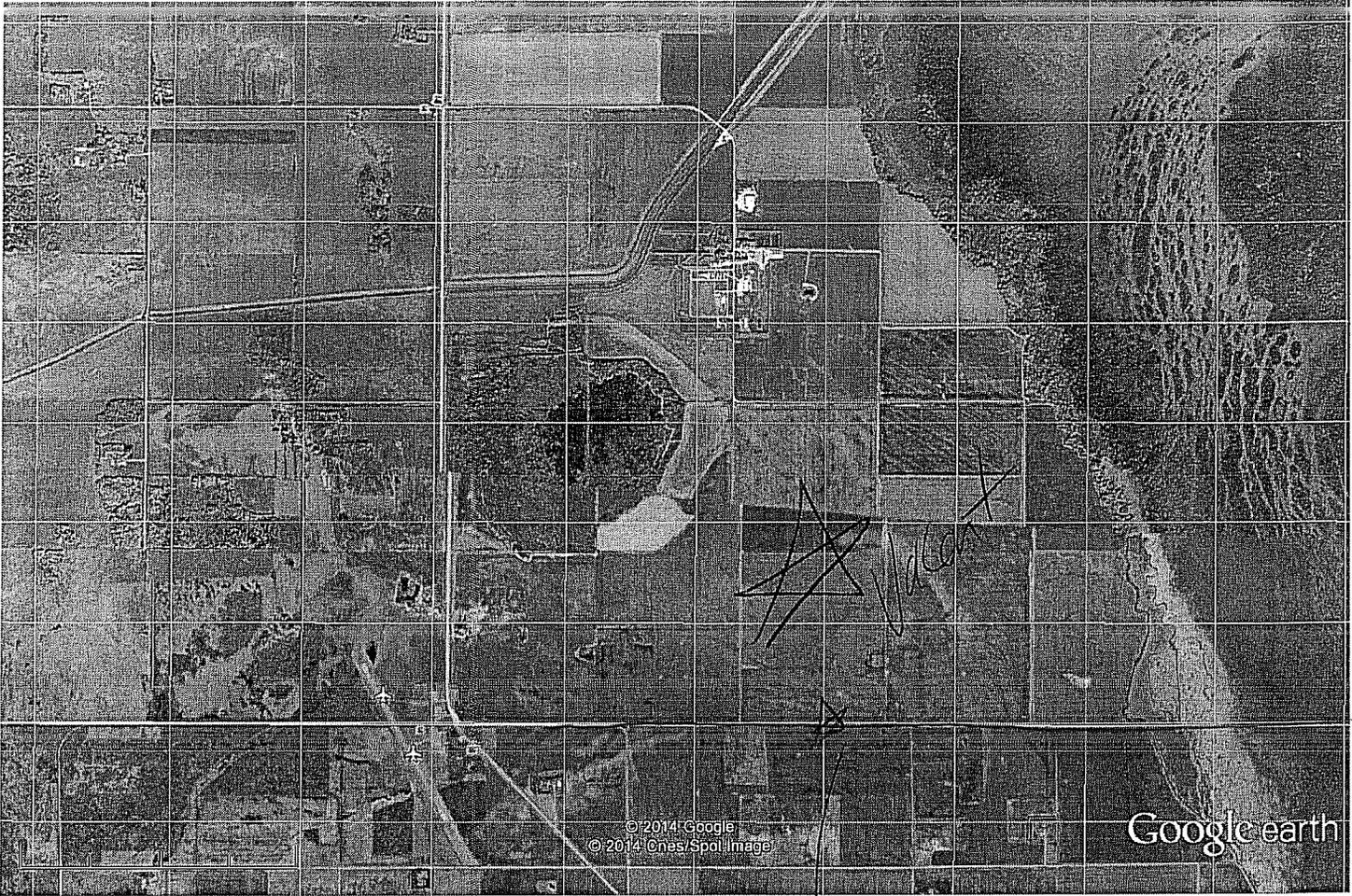
It is furthermore disturbing that MN Power, with the power of eminent domain at hand, will have a full 3000 feet leeway to construct the line so we don't even know exactly where they will put it and to what extent they will vary from the proposed line. It seems to me to be rather sloppy to need that sort of right-away on open non-mountainous lands.

Sincerely,

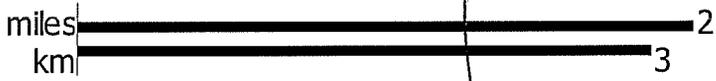
Darin Heller



Exhibit 1

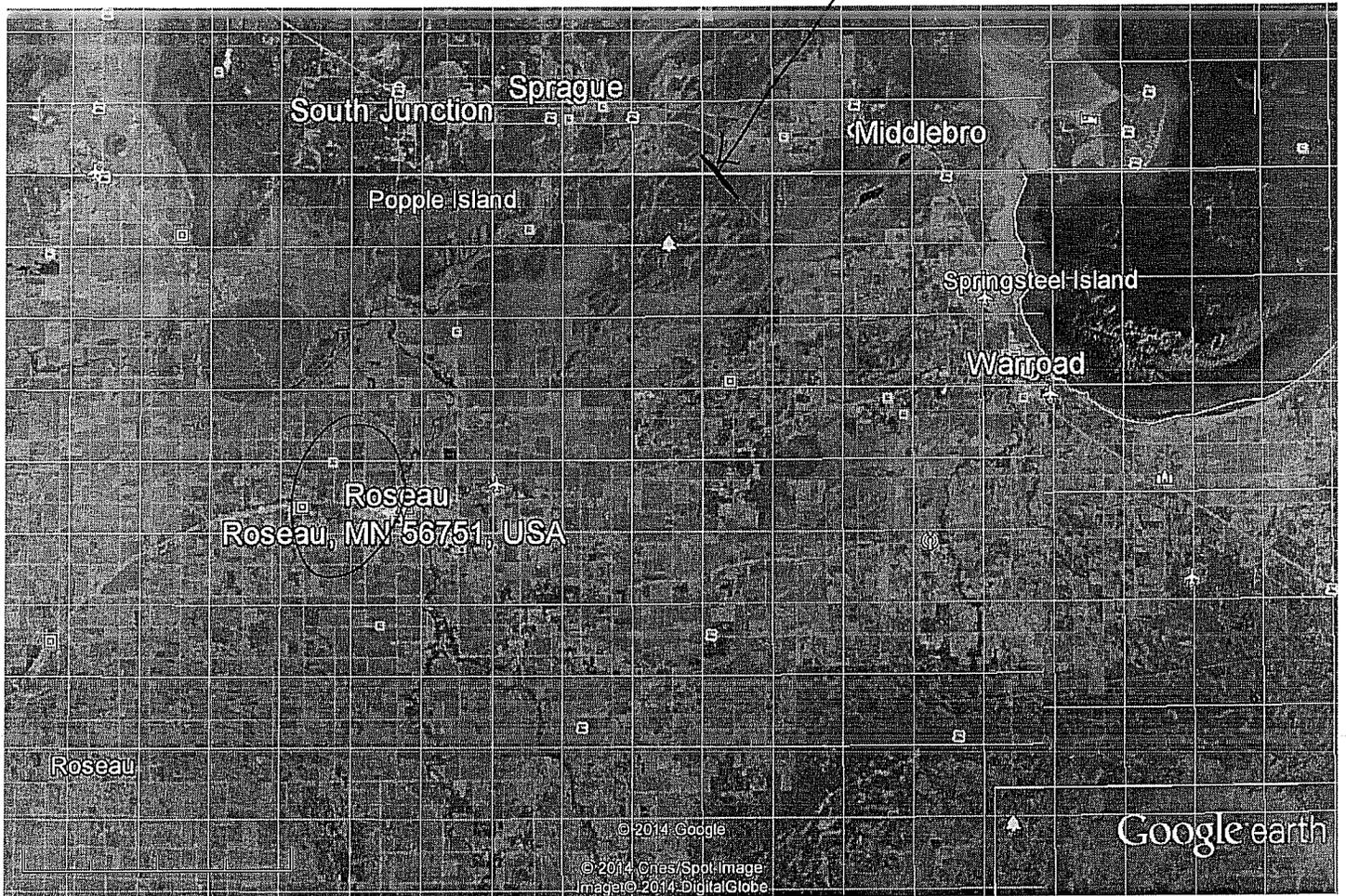


Google earth



pre-cut border swath
all ready to go

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