



12300 Elm Creek Blvd • Maple Grove, Minnesota 55369-4718 • 763-445-5000 • Fax 763-445-5050

March 25, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Mr. Daniel P. Wolf
Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, MN 55101

RE: EQB Monitor Notice of Environmental Assessment Availability
Environmental Assessment
Proposed St. Stephen 115 kV Substation and Transmission Line Upgrade
Docket No. ET-2/TL-15-42

Dear Mr. Wolf:

On behalf of Stearns County and in accordance with Minn. Rules 7850.5300, subp. 5, Great River Energy hereby submits the EQB Monitor Notice of Environmental Assessment (EA) Availability and a copy of the EA for the St. Stephen 115 kV Substation and Transmission Line Upgrade Project proposed by Great River Energy near St. Stephen, Stearns County, Minnesota. Great River Energy chose to permit the project under Minn. Rule 7850.5300, Local Review of Proposed Facilities. Stearns County is the local unit of government that has jurisdiction over the project.

The EA notice will be published in the EQB Monitor on March 30, 2015, and Stearns County cannot make a final decision on the permit until at least 10 days after the notice appears in the EQB Monitor.

Questions regarding this project should be directed to Jennifer Buckentine, Stearns County Environmental Services Department, at 320-656-3613; Rick Heuring of Great River Energy at 763-445-5979; or me at 763-445-5214. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

GREAT RIVER ENERGY

Carole L. Schmidt
Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance

Enclosures

cc: Jennifer Buckentine, Stearns County Environmental Services – w/o encl.
Rick Heuring, GRE – w/o encl.

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COUNTY OF STEARNS

Environmental Services Department

Administration Center Rm 343 • 705 Courthouse Square • St. Cloud, MN 56303
320-656-3613 • Fax 320-656-6484 • 1-800-450-0852

March 16, 2015

SENT VIA EMAIL TO:
EQB.Monitor@state.mn.us

Minnesota Environmental Quality Board
658 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Environmental Quality Board:

Please find enclosed a notice for a 115 kV transmission line upgrade project proposed by Great River Energy and Stearns Electric Association near St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota for publication in the March 30, 2015 edition of the EQB Monitor.

The applicants chose to permit the project under Minn. Rules 7850.5300, Local Review of Proposed Facilities. Stearns County is the local unit of government that has jurisdiction over the project. A copy of the Environmental Assessment for the project was sent to Mr. Daniel Wolf at the Public Utilities Commission and to Deborah Pile at the Department of Commerce, Energy Environmental Review and Analysis.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please give me a call at 320-656-3613.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Buckentine
Senior Environmental Specialist
Stearns County Environmental Services

Cc: Carole Schmidt, GRE (via email)
Rick Heuring, GRE (via email)

Notice Insert for EQB Monitor

St. Stephen 115 kV Substation/Transmission Line Upgrade

Description: Stearns Electric Association is proposing to convert the existing 69 kilovolt (kV) St. Stephen distribution substation to operate at 115 kV and Great River Energy is proposing to rebuild a 1.25 mile segment of existing 69 kV transmission line to 115 kV near the City of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future. A copy of the Environmental Assessment is available at the address below and on the Stearns County website at <http://co.stearns.mn.us/Environment>

RGU: Stearns County

Contact: Comments may be submitted in writing to:

Jennifer Buckentine
Stearns County Environmental Services
Administration Center Room 343
705 Courthouse Square
St. Cloud, MN 56303
phone: 320-656-3613
fax: 320-656-6484
Jennifer.buckentine@co.stearns.mn.us

**Environmental Assessment
for the Proposed**

**St. Stephen
115 kV Substation and Transmission Line Upgrade**

Stearns County, Minnesota

Stearns County

March 2015

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Appendix B	Survey Letter and Responses
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List of Acronyms Used in this Document

ACRONYMS	
ACSR	Aluminum conductor steel reinforced
ALJ	Administrative law judge
Commission	Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
CR	County Road
CUP	Conditional Use Permit
dB dB(A)	Decibel Decibel, A-weighted
DNR	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
EA	Environmental Assessment
EMF	Electromagnetic fields
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EQB	Minnesota Environmental Quality Board
IEEE	Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
kV	Kilovolt
kV/m	Kilovolts per meter
MHS	Minnesota Historical Society
MnDOT	Minnesota Department of Transportation
MPCA	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
NAC	Noise Area Classification
NESC	National Electric Safety Code
NIEHS	National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NWI	National Wetland Inventory
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
ROW	Right of way

ACRONYMS	
SEA	Stearns Electric Association
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SWPPP	Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WPA	Waterfowl Production Area

1.0 Introduction

Great River Energy is a not-for-profit generation and transmission cooperative based in Maple Grove, Minnesota. Great River Energy provides electrical energy and related services to 28 member cooperatives, including Stearns Electric Cooperative (SEA). Great River Energy's distribution cooperatives, in turn, supply electricity and related services to approximately 645,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Great River Energy (GRE), on behalf of Xcel Energy, Stearns Electric Association (SEA) and Minnesota Power, has submitted an application for a conditional use permit to rebuild 1.25 miles of an existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to a 115 kV transmission line. The proposed rebuilt line is location northwest of the City of St. Stephen along County Road 131.

Stearns County is tasked with conducting environmental review on transmission line project requests when the applicant seeks local permitting. Following release of this environmental assessment, a public hearing will be held for the conditional use permit application.

1.1 Project Need and Project Description

The existing electrical system in the St. Stephen, Minnesota area (consisting of distribution lines, transmission lines and substations), is approaching its electrical capacity to reliably deliver electricity to the area consumers. SEA has therefore identified a need to upgrade an existing distribution substation and transmission line to improve and maintain reliable service on the distribution grid in this area.

SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kilovolt (kV) substation to operate at 115 kV and Great River Energy is proposing to rebuild a short segment of existing 69 kV transmission line (approximately 1.25 miles) to 115 kV near the City of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota (**Figure 1-1**).

Great River Energy presently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation (**Figure 1-2**). The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

Easements were originally acquired in 1972 when the existing ST-SST 69 kV transmission line was initially constructed by Cooperative Power Association, predecessor to Great River Energy. Easement language recited in the original easements provides the right to reconstruct the transmission line from time to time with changed dimensions and to operate at different voltages. Consequently, new easements will not be acquired for this project.

The project is discussed in more detail below and in Section 3.0.

Figure 1-1 General Vicinity Map

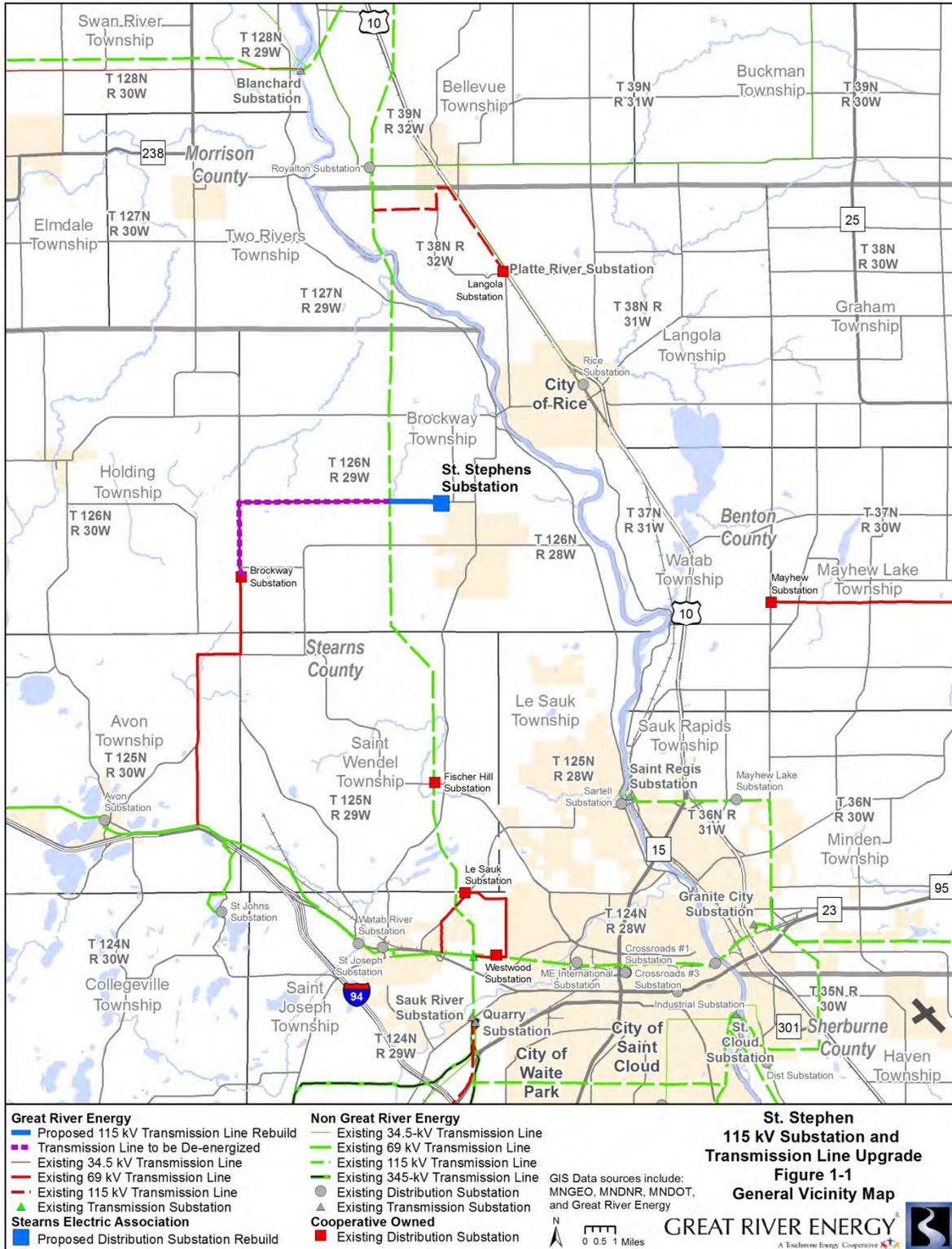
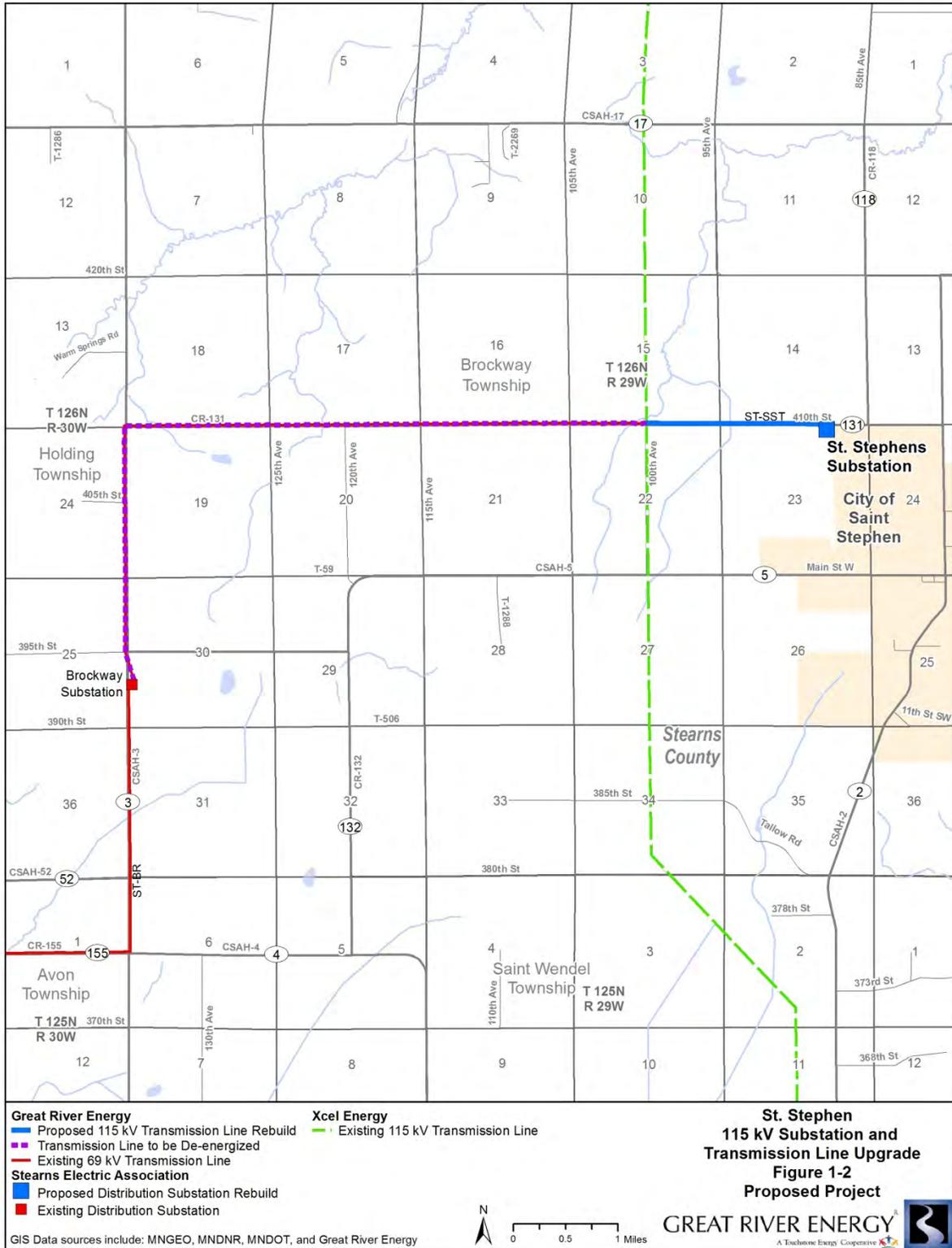


Figure 1-2 Proposed Project



1.2 Project Location and Schedule

The proposed single circuit 115 kV transmission line will be located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23, T126N, R29W, Brockway Township near St. Stephen, Minnesota (**Figures 1-1 and 1-2**). After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new line will cross Stearns County Road (CR) 131 and extend westerly 1.25 miles along the north side of CR 131 to 100th Avenue. At the intersection of CR 131 and 100th Avenue, a steel monopole switch will be installed at the proposed interconnection with the existing 115 kV transmission line owned and operated by Xcel Energy and Minnesota Power.

Project permitting will occur in early 2015 and construction will occur in early 2016.

1.3 Project Cost Estimate

Estimated project costs are listed below.

SEA Substation Upgrade	\$ 560,000
Great River Energy Transmission Line Upgrade	\$ 1,050,000
Total Estimated Project Cost	\$ 1,610,000

2.0 Regulatory Framework

2.1 Permit Requirement

This project falls under the State of Minnesota's Power Plant Siting Act, (Minnesota Statutes § 216E.01-.18 and Minnesota Rules Chapter 7850) for transmission projects over 100 kV and requires a permit from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission). However, for eligible projects, a utility may apply to the local unit of government that has jurisdiction over the project for approval instead of applying to the Commission (Minn. Rules 7850.5300). This proposed 115 kV project is eligible for local review.

Great River Energy is seeking approval for the project from Stearns County. Stearns County has 60 days to relinquish its jurisdiction after receipt of the permit application on January 8, 2015. Stearns County has agreed to act as the lead local unit of government with jurisdiction to approve the project.

As required by Minn. Rules 7850.5300 Subp.3, a project notice (see **Appendix A**) was sent by Great River Energy to the Commission and to those persons on the Power Plant Siting General Notification list indicating that Great River Energy is seeking local approval of the project. A letter from the Division of Energy Resources confirming that the Commission received notification that Great River Energy intends to seek local approval is also included in **Appendix A**.

2.2 Environmental Assessment Requirement

In accordance with Minn. Rules 7850.5300 Subp.5, an environmental assessment (EA) prepared by the local unit of government with jurisdiction over the project must be completed. The EA contains information on the human and environmental impacts of the proposed project and addresses methods to mitigate such impacts.

When the EA is complete, Stearns County must publish a notice in the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) Monitor that the EA is available for review, how a copy of the document may be reviewed, that the public may comment on the document, and the procedure for submitting comments to the County. A final decision on the project cannot be made until at least ten days after the notice appears in the EQB Monitor.

2.3 Public Participation/Scoping of Environmental Assessment

Stearns County sent a survey to the property owners within ¼ mile of the proposed project on January 26, 2015, to solicit input on the scope of the EA (see **Appendix B**). The comment period ended on February 17, 2015. During this process, Stearns County staff received two written comments. Two additional written comments were received after the comment period ended. Survey responses are provided in **Appendix B** and are discussed below.

Survey Responses

One respondent provided information on the names of creeks/ditches in the project area, and had no issues with the transmission line project. The other respondent was in favor of the project.

Of the two responses received after the deadline, one (Brockway Township) had no comments. The other comment was requesting an on-site meeting with a representative from Great River Energy to discuss issues pertaining to EMF and tree removal. A meeting was promptly scheduled and completed on March 3, 2015.

2.4 Conditional Use Permit

With the exception of certain local road-related permits, Stearns County is the legal governing authority for all activities in Brockway Township requiring Conditional Use and zoning-related approval. The proposed project is located entirely within the corporate limits of Brockway Township.

Stearns County requires a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for this project. Great River Energy submitted a Conditional Use Permit Application to Stearns County on January 5, 2015. After the EA is finalized, notice of the EA has been published in the EQB Monitor, and the comment period requirements have been met, Stearns County will hold a public hearing and make a decision on Great River Energy's request for a CUP.

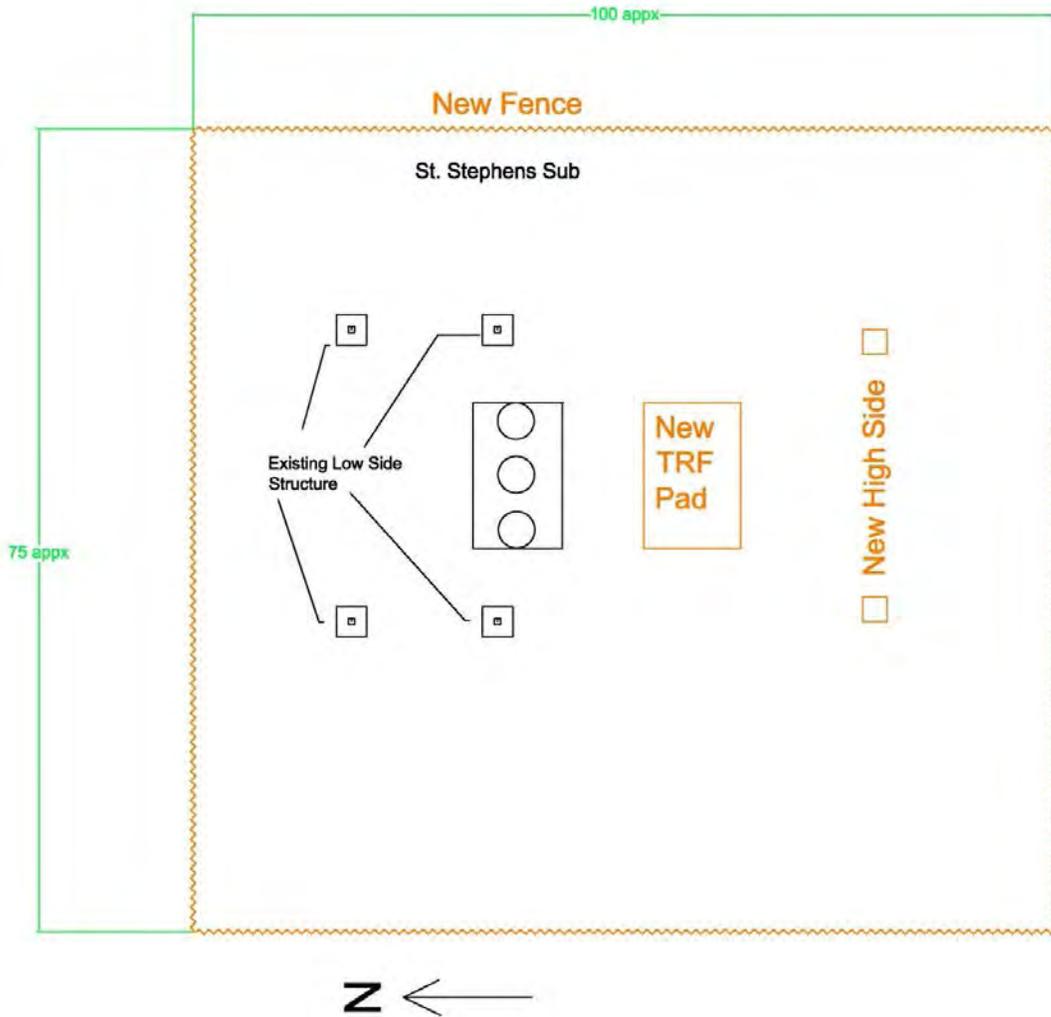
The CUP process is also open to the public as part of the respective review by the Stearns County Planning Commission at its regularly scheduled meetings. The public hearing is scheduled to be held on April 16, 2015. Prior to the public hearing, notices are sent out to landowners located within one-quarter mile of the project corridor, Brockway Township and the City of St. Stephen. Public hearing notices are published in the legal section of the *Cold Spring Record*, the County's official newspaper, and in the local paper for the area (*The St. Cloud Times*). After a recommendation is made by the Planning Commission, the Stearns County Board of Commissioners makes the final decision to approve or deny the CUP application.

3.0 Engineering Design and Construction Procedures

3.1 St. Stephen Substation Upgrade

The St. Stephen distribution substation (**Figure 3-1**) owned by SEA is located in Section 23, Township 126N, Range 29W in Brockway Township. The existing substation is enclosed in a fenced area (55 feet wide by 105 feet deep) situated inside a larger 2.19 acre parcel that is 250 feet wide by 382 feet deep. SEA owns all common facilities (land, fence, etc.) and will operate the distribution facilities. There is a 7-foot high chain link fence (with an additional one foot of barbed wire around the top) around the substation that is designed to deter animals. Access gates into the facility are locked.

Figure 3-1 St. Stephen Substation Plot Plan



The primary components of the upgraded substation will include:

- High Side Structure
- Circuit Switcher
- One 115 kV/12.47 kV Transformer
- Voltage regulator, low side buswork, reclosers (no change)
- Meter/Control building

Minor grading and fencing changes will be required.

Some equipment within the substation will be filled with mineral oil for cooling. This equipment sits on concrete pads with three inches of crushed rock covering the entire fenced-in area in the event of an equipment leak. The substation is inspected monthly for visual leaks.

The new 115 kV transmission line will enter the St. Stephen Substation from the south. Great River Energy will have a permanent easement for its facilities at the proposed substation, and will own the control building, which contains metering and telecommunications equipment, instrumentation and a battery bank.

3.2 Transmission Line Upgrade

The upgraded transmission line will be located on the same centerline as the existing transmission line; however, new pole locations may shift along the same centerline, with adequate setbacks from field access roads and driveways considered in new pole placement. The alignment into the substation will be modified to minimize outages during construction.

The upgraded transmission line will exit the St. Stephen substation property to the north, cross over CR 131, and run west along CR 131 (on the north side of the road) for approximately 1.25 miles to the intersection of CR 131 and 100th Avenue. A steel monopole switch will be installed at this intersection to interconnect the upgraded line (at the junction of Xcel Energy's 115 kV "0868" transmission line and Minnesota Power's 115 kV "163" transmission line). At least one structure on either side of the new switch structure will need to be modified to transition in to the new switch structure.

The line will be constructed using single pole wood structures with horizontal post insulators (**Figure 3-2**). The typical poles will range in height from 60 to 80 feet above ground and they will be spaced approximately 400 feet apart. Structures, pole heights and spans may vary somewhat depending upon topography and environmental constraints (such as road crossings, stream crossings, and required angle structures). The single circuit structures will have three single conductor phase wires and one shield wire. The phase wires will be 477 thousand circular mil Aluminum Conductor Steel

Reinforced (ACSR) with seven steel core strands and 26 outer aluminum strands. The shield wire will be 0.528 optical ground wire.

Horizontal deflections in the transmission line alignment may require guying (the use of anchors and support cables) or specialty structures. Where guying is not practicable, direct embedded laminated wood poles or steel poles on drilled pier concrete foundations may be utilized to avoid the need for support guying.

Figure 3-2 Proposed 115 kV Single Circuit Structure



The transmission line will be designed to meet the National Electric Safety Code (NESC) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) standards. The NESC recommends minimum strength and safety standards for clearances over roadways, buildings, signs, light standards, and other facilities.

Great River Energy intends to meet or exceed the NESC requirements. Clearances over highways and roadways will be a minimum of 24.1 feet, which exceeds the requirements of the NESC and may be increased by Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) or local county highway permitting. Although the existing standards give recommended clearances over buildings, Great River Energy indicates that they generally do not locate transmission lines directly over a building unless it cannot be avoided. Horizontal clearances to buildings, signs, light standards, and other installations will be determined by calculating the blowout of the wire, structure deflection, and safe electrical clearance from the line.

3.3 Right-of-Way Management Practices

After project approvals to upgrade the substation and transmission line are secured from Stearns County, landowners along the 1.25 mile portion of the project (along CR 131) will be notified by a Great River Energy representative of the construction

schedules, access to the site and vegetation clearing required for the project. The existing easements are 60 feet wide, 30 feet on each side of the transmission line. Trees will be completely removed to 30 feet on both sides of the transmission centerline to enable the safe construction, operation and maintenance of the line. Tall trees that are weak, leaning, or diseased and are located more than 30 feet from the transmission line may also be removed if it is determined they could interfere with the safe operation of the transmission line. Wood from the clearing operation will be offered to the landowner or removed from the site. Brush will be chipped and disposed of on the transmission right of way (ROW). It is standard practice to remove any vegetation species that would be a danger to the line when at a mature height.

Some structure locations may require soil analysis to assist with the design of the line. Soil borings would be conducted to determine the soil properties for engineering analysis. An independent geotechnical testing company would take and analyze these borings. Site access would be required and landowners would be contacted for permission.

Where possible, construction staging and equipment laydown areas would be located within the transmission ROW and limited to previously disturbed or developed areas. Upon completion of construction activities, landowners will be contacted to determine if any additional cleanup and restoration needs to be completed.

3.4 Construction Procedures

The proposed 115 kV transmission line would be constructed at grade elevations; therefore, no pole locations would require grading unless it is necessary to provide a level area for construction access and activities. Construction would comply with the latest industry standards regarding clearance to ground, clearance to crossing utilities, clearance to buildings, ROW widths, erecting power poles, and stringing of transmission line conductors.

To accommodate the use of the existing centerline, the existing transmission line would be leaned out of the way so the new poles can be installed. Leaning the poles allows the existing substation to remain energized.

Typical pole structures would require a drilled hole 10 to 15 feet deep and 3 to 4 feet in diameter for each pole. Pole structures in wet environments or angle structures may require additional foundation support, typically consisting of a concrete foundation or placement of the pole base inside a vertical galvanized steel culvert. Erosion control methods would be implemented to minimize runoff during construction. Great River Energy or approved contractors are required to perform transmission line construction in compliance with local, state, NESC, IEEE, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and industry standards.

Poles would be delivered to either the staked location or a project storage yard. If the poles were delivered to a staked site, they would be placed on the ROW out of the clear zone of any adjacent roadways or designated pathways. Insulators and other hardware

would typically be attached while the pole was on the ground. The pole would then be lifted, placed and secured on the foundation by a bucket truck or crane.

Once the structures have been erected, conductors would be installed by establishing stringing setup areas within the ROW. The stringing setup areas would usually be established every two miles along the project route. Conductor stringing operations also require brief access to each structure to secure the conductor wire to the insulators or to install shield wire clamps once final sag is established. Temporary guard or clearance poles would be installed, as needed, over existing distribution or communication lines, streets, roads, highways, railways or other obstructions after any necessary notifications were made or permits obtained. This ensures that conductors would not obstruct traffic or contact existing energized conductors or other cables. In addition, the conductors would be protected from damage.

3.5 Restoration/Maintenance Procedures

During construction, limited ground disturbance at the structure sites may occur. Disturbed areas would be restored to their original condition to the maximum extent practicable as discussed with the landowner. Post-construction reclamation activities include:

- removing and disposing of debris,
- removing all temporary facilities (including staging and laydown areas),
- employing appropriate erosion control measures,
- reseeding and mulching areas disturbed by construction activities with vegetation similar to that which was removed and,
- restoring the areas to their original condition to the extent possible.

In cases where soil compaction has occurred in cropland areas, the construction crews or a restoration contractor will use appropriate methods to alleviate the compaction as discussed with landowners. In cases where it is determined there could be a future reduction in anticipated crop yields due to compaction, compensation for the value of the reduced yield will be offered to the crop owner.

Great River Energy will periodically use the transmission line ROW to perform inspections, maintain equipment, and repair any damage. Regular ROW maintenance for weed control and removal of undesired vegetation will also be conducted in accordance with terms of the easements and any state or local permitting requirements.

4.0 Assessment of Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

Because the project is an upgrade of an existing transmission line and it is located along an existing road corridor, impacts to the environment are expected to be minimal and short-term, with little mitigation required.

Correspondence relative to environmental conditions in the project area and responses received from state and federal agencies that reviewed the project are provided in **Appendix C**.

4.1 Description of Environmental Setting

Stearns County is characterized by rolling hills, farms, scenic lakes, rivers, wetlands, prairies, savannas, and woodlands of a mixture of coniferous and deciduous trees.

The proposed substation and the transmission line corridor are located in areas that are zoned Agricultural 40 and Urban Expansion (see Zoning Map, **Figure 4-1**). Land use in the area is mainly rural residential and agricultural.

4.2 Impacts on Human Settlement

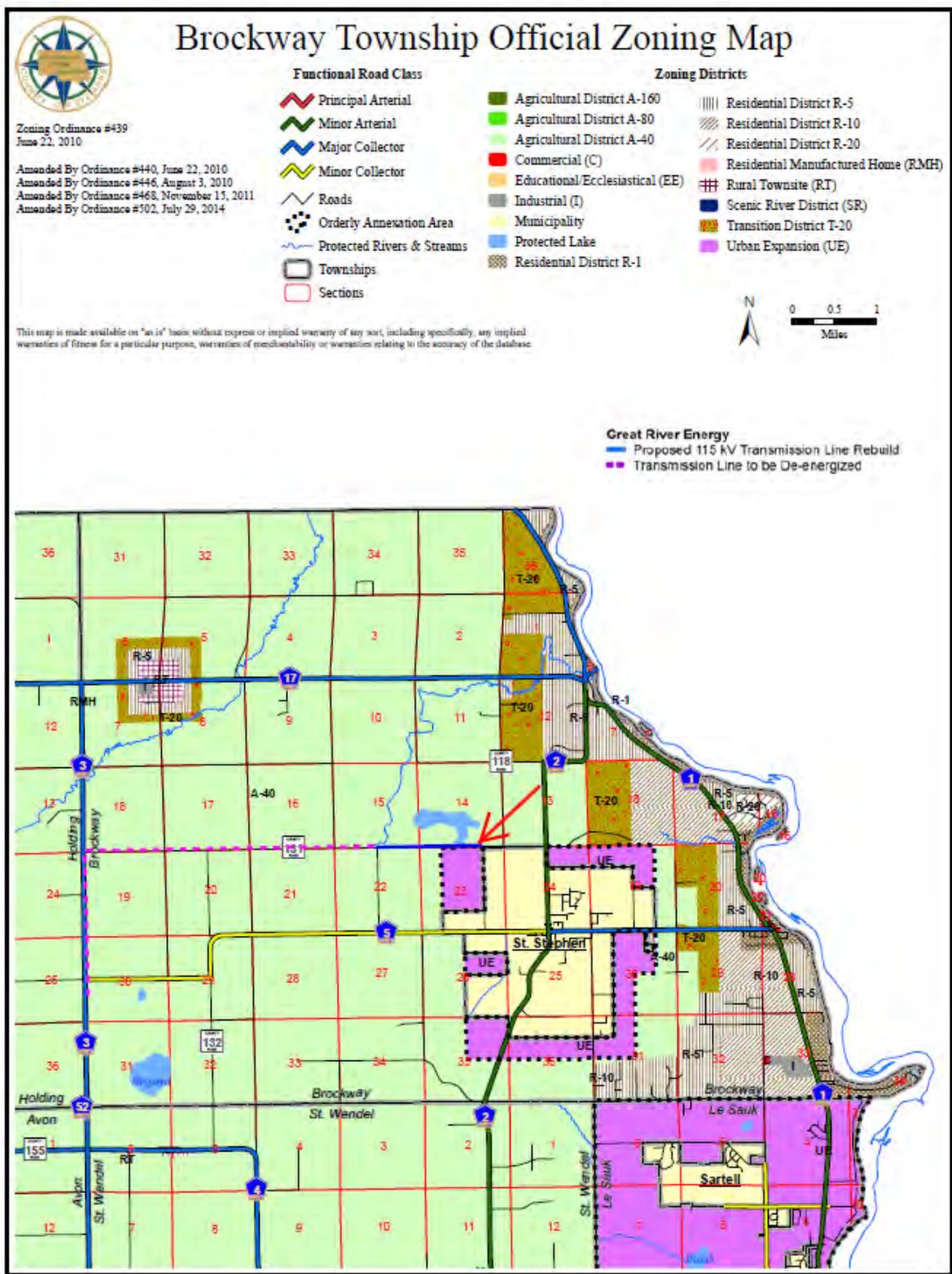
There are a few residences close to the ROW that will be affected by the project. Pole placement will be reviewed and discussed with each landowner to minimize tree loss and visual impacts in those areas close to homes.

4.2.1 Socioeconomics

Stearns County leads the state in agriculture and the economy is also driven by manufacturing, retail and service industries, health care and tourism.

Approximately 15-25 workers will be required for construction of the project. During construction, there would be a small impact on the local community due to revenue created from expenditures of the construction crew (local community services, hotels, restaurants, construction materials). No permanent jobs will be created by this project.

Figure 4-1 Zoning



4.2.2 Displacement

Upgrade of the substation and transmission line will not cause the displacement of any residence or business.

4.2.3 Noise

Noise is composed of a variety of sounds of different intensities across the entire frequency spectrum. Humans perceive sound when sound pressure waves encounter the auditory components in the ear. These components convert these pressure waves into perceivable sound. Transmission conductors and transformers at substations produce noise under certain conditions. The level of noise or its loudness depends on conductor conditions, voltage level, and weather conditions.

Noise is measured in units of decibels (dB) on a logarithmic scale. Because human hearing is not equally sensitive to all frequencies of sound, certain frequencies are given more "weight". The A-weighted scale (dBA) corresponds to the sensitivity range for human hearing. Noise levels capable of being heard by humans are measured in dBA, the A-weighted sound level recorded in units of decibels. A noise level change of 3 dBA is barely perceptible to human hearing. A 5-dBA change in noise level, however, is clearly noticeable. A 10-dBA change in noise levels is perceived as a doubling of noise loudness, while a 20-dBA change is considered a dramatic change in loudness.

Table 4-1 below shows noise levels associated with common, everyday sources. Noise levels for a 115 kV transmission line would typically be between 0 and 20 dBA, depending on the weather.

Table 4-1 Common Noise Sources and Levels

Sound Pressure Level (dB)	Typical Sources
120	Jet aircraft takeoff at 100 feet
110	Jet aircraft at 400 feet
90	Motorcycle at 25 feet
80	Garbage disposal
70	City street corner
60	Conversational speech
50	Typical office
40	Living room (without TV)
30	Quiet bedroom at night

Source: Environmental Impact Analysis Handbook, ed. By Rau and Wooten, 1980

In Minnesota, state rules have been established to regulate noise levels by land use types. The most stringent noise limit is assigned to places with a Noise Area Classification (NAC) of 1, which generally applies to areas where people may normally be expected to sleep. The various NACs are described in the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) noise regulations and the applicable limits for each NAC are shown in **Table 4-2**.

Table 4-2 Noise Area Classifications¹

Day (0700-2200) Night (2200-0700)

NAC	L₅₀	L₁₀	L₅₀	L₁₀
1	60	65	50	55
2	65	70	65	70
3	75	80	75	80

Transmission Line

Noise emission from a transmission line increases during heavy rain and wet conductor conditions. In foggy, damp, or rainy weather conditions, power lines can create a crackling sound due to the small amount of electricity ionizing the moist air near the wires. During heavy rain, the general background noise level is usually greater than the noise from the transmission line. As a result, people do not normally notice audible noise from a transmission line during heavy rain. This is confirmed by calculated levels during a heavy rain (one inch per hour) that shows noise levels for a 115 kV line at less than 25% of the most sensitive state NAC (NAC 1). During light rain, dense fog, snow, and other times when there is moisture in the air, transmission lines will produce audible noise at approximately household background levels. During dry weather, audible noise from transmission lines is barely perceptible.

Substation

Noise associated with substations includes the operation of transformers and switchgear. The transformers produce a constant low-frequency humming noise while the switchgear produces an impulsive or short duration noise during infrequent activation of the circuit breakers. Due to the infrequent operation of the switchgear, the noise generated would be considered temporary in nature and not predicted to exceed the MPCA Noise Limits.

The upgraded St. Stephen Substation will be designed to comply with Minnesota Noise standards (Minnesota Rules part 7030). The controlling limit for the substation is the nighttime Noise Area 1 Classification (Table 4-2). Under this

¹ Minn. R. 7030.0040 (2003).

classification, noise levels are limited to 50 dBA during nighttime hours at the nearest location where a person is reasonably expected to sleep.

For the St. Stephen Substation, the nearest noise receptor is a single family home located approximately 1500 feet west of the proposed substation. The noise specification for the transformer to be installed in the St. Stephen Substation is 66 dBA measured at a distance of 1 meter around the perimeter of the transformer.

A simplified, conservative model² was used to determine the distance at which the noise would attenuate to 50 dBA. Noise propagation through the outdoor atmosphere typically decreases in level with increasing distance between the source and the receiver. The noise attenuation is the result of several mechanisms, including geometrical spreading of the sound waves, shielding provided by physical structures, atmospheric absorption of the acoustic energy and ground effects on the sound waves. In general, the noise or sound pressure levels emitted from the substation will decrease approximately 6 dB for each doubling of distance from the source to the receiver. The simplified model was prepared based on this 6-dB reduction with a doubling of distance. The model is conservative in that it does not factor in any attenuation from shielding or ground effects.

Noise from the St. Stephen Substation should be within the state noise limits at 20 feet and greater from the transformer with the fans running. The nearest residence to the substation is over 1,500 feet from the substation, and at this distance, noise levels would be approximately 12 dBA.

4.2.4 Aesthetics

The project will have limited impact on aesthetics of the area. The upgraded transmission line will be visible along the road that it parallels, but it is replacing an existing transmission line. Homes within 500 feet of the line will be the most likely to have their viewshed affected by the construction of the transmission line.

Although the upgraded 115 kV transmission line structures will be taller (about 20-25 feet) than the existing 69 kV structures, they will have a slightly narrower cross-section that will be less intrusive than the existing wooden cross-arm structures.

Although the upgraded transmission line will be a contrast to surrounding land uses, Great River Energy has indicated that they will work with landowners to identify concerns related to the proposed transmission line and substation, using the following strategies:

² The simplified model is based off the following formula: $S_2 = S_1 - 20 * \text{Log}(d_2/d_1)$. S_2 = Noise level at distance d_2 (dBA), S_1 = Measured sound level at d_1 (dBA), D_1 = Distance from noise source to S_1 noise measurement (ft), and D_2 = Distance from noise source at which S_2 is calculated (ft).

- Location of structures, right-of-way and other disturbed areas will be determined by considering input from landowners or land management agencies to minimize visual impacts.
- Care will be used to preserve the natural landscape; construction and operation will be conducted to prevent any unnecessary destruction of the natural surroundings in the vicinity of the work.
- The new transmission line virtually overtakes the existing 69 kV transmission line and parallels the existing County Road 131 road right of way.
- Structures will be placed at the maximum feasible distance from highway, trail and water crossings, within limits of structure design.

4.2.5 Human Health and Safety

No threats to public health and safety are anticipated for this project. All facilities will be constructed in accordance with all applicable standards, including the NESC and other industry standards. Construction personnel will be required to follow OSHA regulations. Other safety measures such as warning signs, fencing, and gates will be utilized as needed.

Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMF)

The term electromagnetic fields (EMF) refers to electric and magnetic fields that are coupled together, such as in high frequency radiating fields. For the lower frequencies associated with power lines, EMF should be separated into electric fields and magnetic fields. For any specific line design, the height of the set of phase conductors above ground has a marked influence on the maximum electric and magnetic fields.

Voltage on a wire produces an electric field in the area surrounding the wire. The voltage on the conductors of a transmission line generates an electric field extending from the energized conductors to other nearby objects, such as the ground, towers, vegetation, buildings, and vehicles. The intensity of electric fields, measured in kilovolts/meter (kV/m), is proportional to the voltage of the line and the magnitude of the electric field rapidly decreases with distance from the transmission line conductors. The presence of trees, buildings, or other solid structures nearby can also significantly reduce the magnitude of the electric field. Electric fields of transmission lines above ground are designated by the difference in voltage between two points (usually one meter).

Magnetic fields arise from the flow of electricity (current) in the transmission line. The intensity of the magnetic field is related to the current flow through the conductors. The magnetic field associated with the transmission line surrounds the conductor and rapidly decreases as the distance from the conductor increases. Magnetic field density is expressed in the unit of gauss or milligauss.

Considerable research has been conducted in recent decades to determine whether exposure to power-frequency (60 hertz) electric and magnetic fields can cause biological responses and adverse health effects. The multitude of epidemiological and toxicological studies has shown at most a weak association (i.e., no statistically significant association) between EMF exposure and health risks.

In 1999, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) issued its final report on “Health Effects from Exposure to Power-Line Frequency Electric and Magnetic Fields” in response to the Energy Policy Act of 1992. In the report, the NIEHS concluded that the scientific evidence linking EMF exposures with health risks is weak and that this finding does not warrant aggressive regulatory concern. However, in light of the weak scientific evidence supporting some association between EMF and health effects and the fact that exposure to electrical systems is common in the United States, the NIEHS stated that passive regulatory action, such as providing public education on reducing exposures, is warranted.³

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) comes to a similar conclusion about the link between adverse health effects, specifically childhood leukemia, and power-frequency EMF exposure. On its website, the EPA states:

Many people are concerned about potential adverse health effects. Much of the research about power lines and potential health effects is inconclusive. Despite more than two decades of research to determine whether elevated EMF exposure, principally to magnetic fields, is related to an increased risk of childhood leukemia, there is still no definitive answer. The general scientific consensus is that, thus far, the evidence available is weak and is not sufficient to establish a definitive cause-effect relationship.⁴

Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin have each conducted their own literature reviews or research to examine this issue. In 2002, Minnesota formed an Interagency Working Group to evaluate the research and develop policy recommendations to protect the public health from any potential problems arising from EMF effects associated with HVTLs. The Minnesota Department of Health published the Working Group’s findings in *A White Paper on Electric and Magnetic Field (EMF) Policy and Mitigation Options*. The Working Group summarized its findings as follows:

Research on the health effects of EMF has been carried out since the 1970s. Epidemiological studies have mixed results – some have shown no statistically significant association between exposure to EMF and health

³ Report is available at <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/emf/>

⁴ <http://www.epa.gov/radtown/power-lines.html>

*effects, some have shown a weak association. More recently, laboratory studies have failed to show such an association, or to establish a biological mechanism for how magnetic fields may cause cancer. A number of scientific panels convened by national and international health agencies and the United States Congress have reviewed the research carried out to date. Most researchers concluded that there is insufficient evidence to prove an association between EMF and health effects; however many of them also concluded that there is insufficient evidence to prove that EMF exposure is safe.*⁵

Based on findings like those of the Working Group and NIEHS, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission has consistently found that “there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a causal relationship between EMF exposure and any adverse human health effects.”⁶ This conclusion was further justified in the recent Route Permit proceedings for the Brookings County – Hampton 345 kV Project (“Brookings Project”). In the Brookings Project Route Permit proceedings, the Applicants (Great River Energy and Xcel Energy) and one of the intervening parties both provided expert evidence on the potential impacts of electric and magnetic fields on human health. The administrative law judge (ALJ) in that proceeding evaluated written submissions and a day-and-a-half of testimony from the two expert witnesses. The ALJ concluded: “there is no demonstrated impact on human health and safety that is not adequately addressed by the existing State standards for [EMF] exposure.”⁷ The Commission adopted this finding on July 15, 2010.⁸

There is no federal standard for transmission line electric fields. The maximum electric field for the proposed St. Stephen project is 1.402 kV/m, which is well under the maximum limit of 8 kV/m that has been a permit condition imposed by EQB in other transmission line routing proceedings.

There are no federal or Minnesota exposure standards for magnetic fields. The EQB and the Commission have recognized Florida (a 150-mG limit) and New York (a 200-mG limit) state standards. Both state standards are to be considered at the edge of ROW. The maximum magnetic field for the proposed St. Stephen project is 4.476-mG.

⁵ Minnesota Department of Health. 2002. *A White Paper on Electric and Magnetic Field (EMF) Policy and Mitigation Options*

⁶ See, for example, *In the Matter of the Application for a HVTL Route Permit for the Tower Transmission Line Project*, Docket No. ET-2, E015/TL-06-1624, Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order Issuing a Route Permit to Minnesota Power and Great River Energy for the Tower Transmission Line Project and Associated Facilities (August 1, 2007).

⁷ *In the Matter of the Route Permit Application by Great River Energy and Xcel Energy for a 345 kV Transmission Line from Brookings County, South Dakota to Hampton, Minnesota*, Docket No. ET-2/TL-08-1474, ALJ Findings of Fact, Conclusions and Recommendation at Finding 216 (April 22, 2010 and amended April 30, 2010).

⁸ *In the Matter of the Route Permit Application by Great River Energy and Xcel Energy for a 345 kV Transmission Line from Brookings County, South Dakota to Hampton, Minnesota*, Docket No. ET-2/TL-08-1474, Order Granting Route Permit (September 14, 2010).

4.2.6 Public Services

Impacts to other utilities (gas, telephone, electric, water, sewer) will be avoided or minimized. Public services would not be affected by the construction and operation of substation or proposed transmission line.

4.2.7 Transportation

The 1.25-mile transmission line will be rebuilt along existing CR 131 ROW. Temporary road closures or lane reductions may be necessary during construction. The applicant will obtain the necessary permits from the County Highway Department for such road closures or lane reductions and any work in the County ROW. Operation of the proposed transmission line will not affect the major roads in the area.

There are no airports in the vicinity of the proposed project (St. Cloud Regional Airport is nearly 16 miles away).

The MnDOT Office of Aeronautics was contacted regarding any potential impacts to airports in the vicinity. In a reply email dated November 25, 2014 (**Appendix C**), the Office of Aeronautics indicated they did not have any concerns related to the proposed project.

4.3 Impacts on Land-based Economies

4.3.1 Recreation/Tourism

Stearns County has many year-round recreational, cultural and social opportunities in both urban and rural areas. The numerous lakes and rivers in Stearns County support a thriving tourist trade, and the Stearns County Parks system offers opportunities for hiking, biking, boating, fishing, swimming, rock climbing and scuba diving. The project is not expected to affect recreational or tourism opportunities in the area.

4.3.2 Agriculture

The proposed project will not impact farmland in a detrimental manner or in any greater magnitude than the existing 69 kV transmission line. Special construction practices will be utilized to meet all the requirements applicable to an existing organic farm operation located in the SW $\frac{1}{2}$ - SW $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 14, T126N, R29W. Examples of these special construction practices include:

No tobacco use

No application of prohibited substances:

- No herbicides
- No pesticides
- No fertilizers
- No unapproved seed
- No drift or runoff of non-approved substances applied to adjacent non-organic property

No routine equipment maintenance:

- Equipment wash downs will likely be required before entering organic property
- No refueling
- No storage of lubricant or fuel
- Leak checks for fuel, hydraulic and lubrication systems required

4.3.3 Mining and Forestry

There are currently no mining operations in the vicinity of the proposed project.

Although two-thirds of Stearns County was originally covered with forest, much of the remaining woodland is in small tracts and wood production is limited.

The line will cross one privately-owned woodlot/shelterbelt. Great River Energy will replace or compensate for windbreaks as determined through negotiations with individual landowners.

4.4 Archaeological and Historic Resources

Merjent conducted a cultural resources literature review (see letter dated October 29, 2014, **Appendix C**) for the project. A review of records indicated no previously recorded archaeological sites or historic structures in the project area.

The Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) was contacted to obtain comments regarding cultural resources in the project area. In a reply letter dated November 21, 2014 (**Appendix C**), the MHS indicated that there are no properties listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places, and no known or suspected archaeological properties in the area that will be affected by the project.

The line will be rebuilt along an existing transmission line corridor. Because no adverse impact on known or suspected cultural resources is anticipated as a result of this project, no additional cultural resources work is proposed.

4.5 Natural Environment

4.5.1 Air Quality

The only potential air emissions from a transmission line result from corona, which may produce ozone and oxides of nitrogen. This can occur when the electric field intensity exceeds the breakdown strength of the air. For a 115 kV transmission line, the conductor surface gradient is typically below the air breakdown level. As such, it is unlikely that any measurable emissions would occur from the conductor surface.

During construction of the proposed transmission lines, there would be emissions from vehicles and other construction equipment and fugitive dust from ROW clearing. Temporary air quality impacts caused by the proposed construction-related emissions would be expected to occur during this phase of activity. The magnitude of these emissions is influenced heavily by weather conditions and the specific construction activity taking place. Adverse impacts to the surrounding environment would be minimal because of the short and intermittent nature of the emission and dust-producing construction phases. Appropriate dust control measures will be implemented.

4.5.2 Water Resources, Wetlands and Soils

Streams, Lakes and Ditches

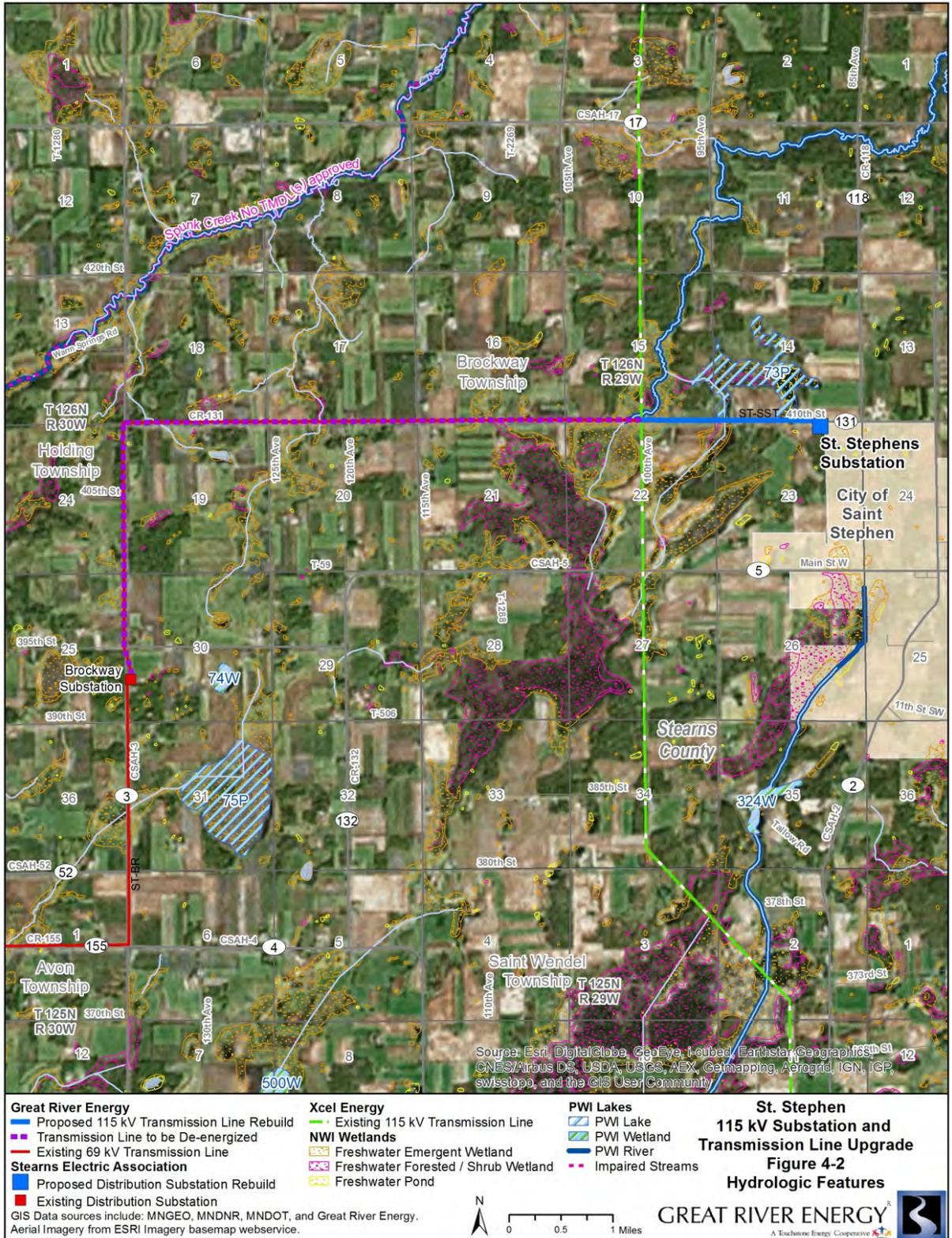
The rebuilt transmission line will cross one Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Public Water (73P, **Figure 4-2**) twice along CR 131 (Section 14, T126N, R29W). The transmission line will span this water at both crossings; therefore impacts from construction will be minimal. Great River Energy will apply to the DNR for a license to cross Public Water 73P.

The rebuilt transmission line also crosses County Ditch #27. The transmission line will span the ditch; therefore there will be no impact to the ditch from the construction. The acting County Surveyor is reviewing the proposal.

Once the Project is completed, there would be no significant impact on surface water quality because no transmission structures will be located within the stream, and no lakes in the area will be affected.

The applicant has indicated that sound water and soil conservation practices will be maintained during construction and operation of the Project to protect topsoil and adjacent water resources and minimize soil erosion. These practices may include:

Figure 4-2 Hydrologic Features



- Containment of stockpiled material away from stream banks and lake shorelines
- Stockpiling and re-spreading topsoil
- Reseeding and re-vegetating disturbed areas
- Implementing erosion and sediment controls
- Structures and disturbed areas will be located as far away from rivers and streams as practicable

Wetlands

Wetlands are important resources for flood abatement, wildlife habitat, and water quality. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) produced maps of wetlands based on aerial photographs and Natural Resources Conservation Service soil surveys starting in the 1970s. These wetlands are known as the National Wetland Inventory (NWI). Wetlands listed on the NWI may be inconsistent with current wetland conditions; however, NWIs are the most accurate and readily available database of wetland resources in the vicinity of the project and were therefore used to identify wetlands along the proposed transmission line route. Wetlands in the project area are shown on **Figure 4-2**.

The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was contacted requesting information on the possible effects of the proposed Project on floodplains, waters, and wetlands. The USACE typically only provides a general response on a project until it receives a jurisdictional determination request and/or a permit application. In a reply letter dated December 4, 2014 (**Appendix C**), the USACE did address its' regulatory jurisdiction and permitting requirements.

Although it will be possible to span some of the wetland areas along the Great River Energy single circuit portion of the project along CSAH 131, a small amount of fill material may be discharged into wetland areas due to pole installation. If the discharge exceeds permitting thresholds, Great River Energy will apply for a Regional General Permit from the USACE under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act once design details are available.

Wetland impacts will be minimized and mitigated, disturbed soil will be restored to previous conditions or better, and the amount of land area converted to an impervious surface will be very small.

Soils

Soils in the project corridor are dominated by well-drained sandy loams (Flak, Chetek), somewhat poorly to moderately well-drained fine sandy loams (Nokay, Brainerd), poorly-drained sandy loam and fine sandy loam (Prebish) and a couple small areas of very poorly-drained muck-type soils (Cathro, Rifle). Slopes generally range from 1-8%.

The soil type at the substation site is the well-drained Flak sandy loam.

The Flak sandy loam, the Brainerd fine sandy loam, and the Nokay fine sandy loam (when drained) are considered prime farmland soils.

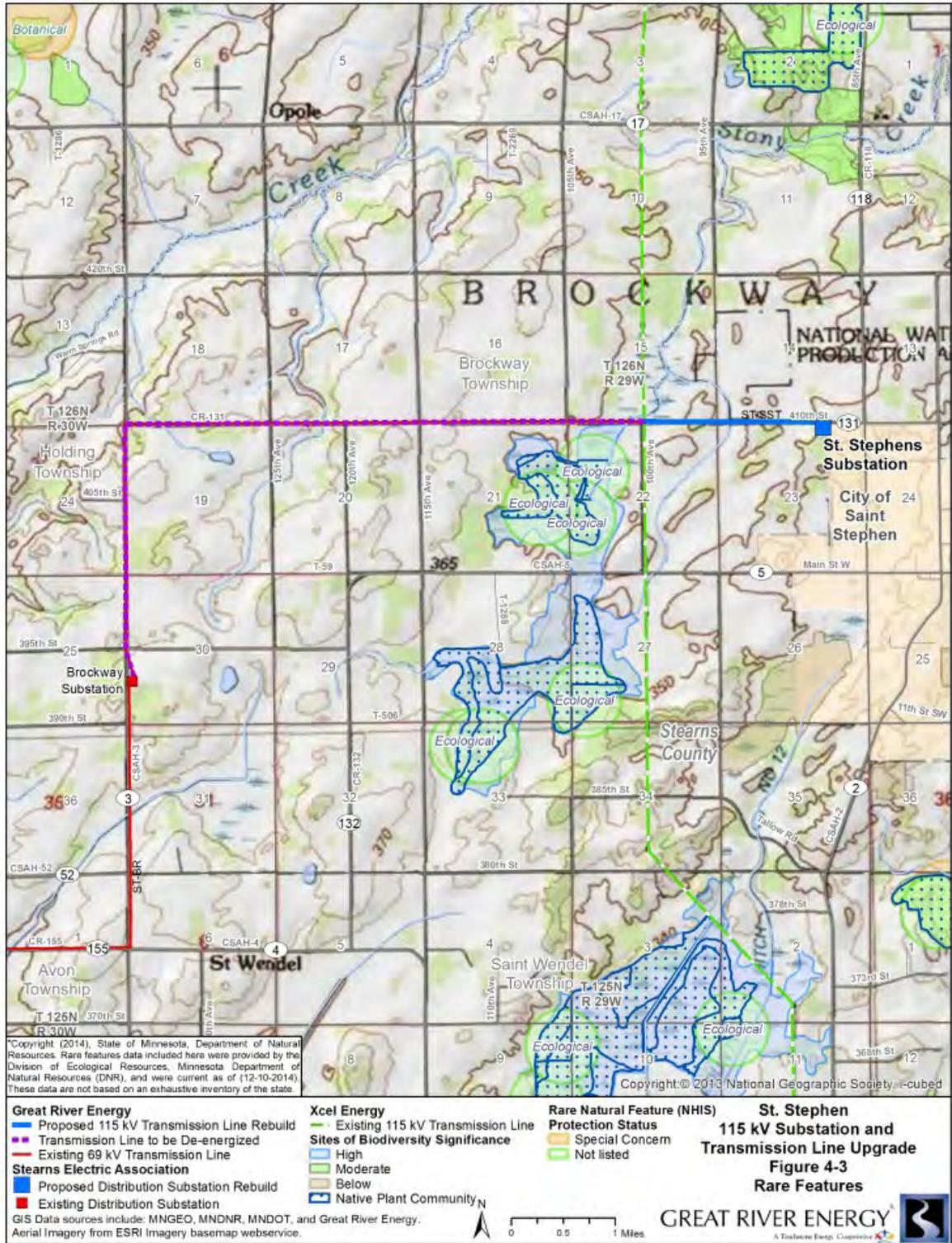
4.5.3 Vegetation and Wildlife/Rare and Unique Natural Resources

The DNR and the USFWS were contacted regarding vegetation and wildlife resources in the vicinity of the project.

The DNR Rare Features database indicates that there are no rare features in the vicinity of the proposed project (**Figure 4-3**). In an email response dated January 9, 2014 (**Appendix C**), the DNR concurred with this assessment.

Effects on area wildlife will be minimal. In an email response dated January 30, 2015 (**Appendix C**), the USFWS indicated that the Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) is located in Stearns County; however, their records indicate there are no federally listed or proposed species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat within the action area of the proposed project. The proposed route crosses the southern boundary of Brockway Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) and is within the existing ROW approved by the USFWS in 1973. USFWS recommended working with the Litchfield Wetland Management District's Project Leader to ensure that the ROW boundaries are clearly identified and that a special use permit is not needed for this project. For the portion of the line that crosses Section 14, Township 126N, Range 29W (about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile), the USFWS recommended bird flight diverters be placed on the line to reduce the likelihood of bird strikes.

Figure 4-3 Rare Features



5.0 Regulatory Permits and Approvals Required

Permit requirements or approvals anticipated for this project and the status of each are shown below in **Table 5-1**.

Table 5-1 Regulatory Permits and Approvals Required

Government Unit	Type of Approval	Regulated Activity	Status
US Dept. of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Threatened and Endangered Species Review	Review of records for federally threatened or endangered species that may exist at or near the proposed transmission facilities	There are no federally listed or proposed species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat within the action area of the proposed project (email of 1/30/15).
US Dept. of the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	Wetland and Waterways Review	Review navigable water and the dredging or filling of US waters including wetlands	A general letter was received from the Corps (letter of 12/4/14). If required, Great River Energy will apply for a permit once design details are available.
MN Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR)	Environmental Review – Wetlands, Water, Trails, Threatened and Endangered Species	Comprehensive review of transmission line impacts	Concurrence that no rare features would be impacted in the project area. (email of 1/9/15).
MN Historical Society State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	SHPO Review of Nationally Registered Historic Places	Historic preservation	No properties listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places, and no known or suspected archaeological properties in the area that will be affected by this project (letter of 11/21/14).
Minnesota Department of Transportation-Aeronautics Division	Airspace Concerns	Public and private airports/airstrips	No effects on publicly-owned airports anticipated; no objection to the project (email of 11/25/14).
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit	Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and stormwater permit required for disturbance of \geq one acre.	If soil disturbance will be \geq one acre for the project, a SWPPP will be prepared and a stormwater permit obtained.
DNR Lands and Minerals	License to Cross Public Water	License required if project crosses DNR Public Waters	Great River Energy will apply to the DNR for a license for the Public Water 73P.
Stearns County Highway Department	County Highway Utility Permit	Permit required prior to construction.	All required permits will be acquired for construction.
Stearns County	Conditional Use Permit	Construction of new facilities	The application was submitted and is in process.
Brockway Township	Right of Way Permit	Utility work within right of way	Permits will be acquired for construction.

Exhibit A

Notice to PUC

Letter from PUC Confirming Local Review



GREAT RIVER
ENERGY®

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

12300 Elm Creek Boulevard • Maple Grove, Minnesota 55369-4718 • 763-445-5000 • 763-445-5050

January 13, 2015

Mr. Dan Wolf
Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, MN 55101

RE: Proposed St. Stephen Substation and Transmission Line Upgrade

Dear Mr. Wolf:

In accordance with the Power Plant Siting Act, Minn. Stat. § 216E.05, subd. 3, this letter, filed via eFiling, serves as the required notice to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) that Great River Energy has elected to seek local approval to upgrade existing transmission infrastructure near St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota.

The existing electrical system in the St. Stephen, Minnesota area (consisting of distribution lines, transmission lines and substations), is approaching its electrical capacity to reliably deliver electricity to the area consumers. Great River Energy and its' member cooperative Stearns Electric Association (SEA) have therefore identified a need to upgrade an existing distribution substation and transmission line to improve and maintain reliable service on the distribution grid in this area.

Great River Energy presently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation. The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

The proposed project is located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23, T126N, R29W and the upgraded transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line. A project description/site map is enclosed for your information.

Mr. Dan Wolf
January 13, 2015
Page 2

Great River Energy intends to permit the project through Stearns County. A Conditional Use Permit application for the project was submitted to the county on January 5, 2015. Stearns County has been informed that it has 60 days to refer the permitting process to the Commission.

Questions regarding this project should be directed to Jennifer Buckentine, Stearns County Environmental Services Department, at 320-656-3613; Rick Heuring of Great River Energy at 763-445-5979; or me at 763-445-5214. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

GREAT RIVER ENERGY



Carole L. Schmidt
Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance

Enclosure

cc: Special Service List - General List 7850.2100 -1A – w/encl.
Jennifer Buckentine, Stearns County Environmental Services – w/encl.
Deborah Pile, Department of Commerce – w/encl.
Rick Heuring, GRE – w/encl.

St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade



GREAT RIVER ENERGY
12300 Elm Creek Blvd
Maple Grove, MN 55369-4718
763-445-5000
www.greatriverenergy.com



STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION
900 E. Kraft Drive, P.O. Box 40
Melrose, MN 56352-0040
320-256-4241
www.stearnselectric.org

Project Description/Need

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV, and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the city of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minn. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area.

Great River Energy currently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation (see map on back). The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

Proposed Project

This project will include constructing a new transmission line termination structure and replacing the existing 69 kV transformer with a new 115 kV transformer at the St. Stephen Substation, and rebuilding approximately 1.25 miles of the ST-SST line to 115 kV. The project also includes installing a new 3-way switch structure at the proposed interconnection with an existing 115 kV transmission line (at 100th Avenue). The new 115 kV transmission line will utilize 477 ACSR conductor attached to single wood poles 60-80 feet in height (see photo). The spacing between the new poles will be approximately 400 feet.

Proposed Route

After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 131 (see map on back).

Project Schedule

Great River Energy will seek approval for this project through Stearns County.

Public contacts and/or notifications -----	Fall 2014
Project permitting -----	Late 2014 - early 2015
Survey/design -----	2015
Easement acquisition/right-of-way permits -----	2015
Transmission line construction -----	2016
Energization -----	Summer 2016



Typical 115 kV Wood Structure

For project updates and information, please contact:

Rick Heuring
Great River Energy
(763) 445-5979
rheuring@greenergy.com

Tim Weir
Stearns Electric Association
(320) 256-1604
tweir@stearnselectric.org

Date last revised: 12/16/2014

RECEIVED JAN 21 2015



STATE OF MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

January 16, 2015

Carole L. Schmidt
Great River Energy
12300 Elm Creek Boulevard
Maple Grove, MN 55369-4718

Jennifer Buckentine
Stearns County Environmental Services
Administration Center Room 343
705 Courthouse Square
St. Cloud, MN 56303

RE: Local Review of Great River Energy's St. Stephens Substation and Transmission Line Upgrade in Stearns County, Minnesota
Docket No. ET-2/TL-15-42

Dear Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Buckentine:

This letter confirms that the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) has received Great River Energy's (GRE) letter dated January 13, 2015, indicating that it has elected to pursue local review approval to convert the St. Stephens distribution substation to 115 kV and rebuild approximately 1.25 miles of 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV near the city of St. Stephens, Stearns County, Minnesota.

Under the Minnesota Statutes Chapter 216E, a route permit from the Commission is required for most high-voltage transmission lines that are greater than 100 kV. However, certain projects may be eligible for review and permitting by local units of government with jurisdiction instead of filing with the Commission. The transmission line and substation upgrade proposed by GRE is eligible for local review under Minn. Stat. § 216E.05.

GRE has indicated that Stearns County is the local government unit with jurisdiction to conduct environmental review and permit the proposed project.

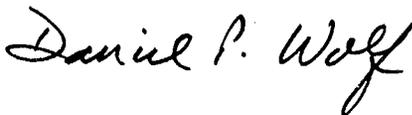
Under Minn. Stat. § 216E.05, subd. 1(b), a local unit of government may relinquish its jurisdiction by requesting the Commission to assume jurisdiction and make a decision on the permit. The request must be filed within 60 days after an application for the proposed project has been filed. A conditional use permit application for the project was filed with Stearns County on January 5, 2015.

Under Minn. R. 7850.5300, subp. 5, an environmental assessment must be prepared by the local unit of government with jurisdiction over the project. Specific requirements with regard to the environmental review process include providing an opportunity for the public to participate in the development of the scope of the environmental assessment before it is prepared; publishing notice in the *EQB Monitor* of when the assessment is available for review and of the procedure for commenting on the assessment; and withholding a final decision on the project until at least 10 days after the notice appears in the *EQB Monitor*. A copy of the environmental assessment must be provided to the Commission upon completion. The environmental assessment may be filed using the Commission's electronic filing system (<https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling>).

This letter acknowledges that GRE has also sent the required notice under Minn. R. 7850.5300, subp. 3, to those persons on the Commission's general notification list that a permit has been applied for from the local unit of government.

If you have any questions, please direct them to Scott Ek of the Commission staff at 651-201-2255 or scott.ek@state.mn.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel P. Wolf". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'D' and 'W'.

Daniel P. Wolf
Executive Secretary

Exhibit B

Survey Letter and Responses



COUNTY OF STEARNS

Environmental Services Department

Administration Center Rm 343 • 705 Courthouse Square • St. Cloud, MN 56303
320-656-3613 • Fax 320-656-6484 • 1-800-450-0852

January 26, 2015

To: Property Owners within ¼ mile of Proposed Transmission Line Project
Brockway Township Chair, Clerk and Zoning Administrator
City of St. Stephen

RE: Survey on Proposed Substation/Transmission Line Upgrade Project near St. Stephen, MN

Dear Interested Party:

Great River Energy and Stearns Electric Association (SEA) are proposing a transmission upgrade project in Stearns County, Minnesota. The existing electrical system in the St. Stephen, Minnesota area (consisting of distribution lines, transmission lines and substations), is approaching its electrical capacity to reliably deliver electricity to the area consumers. Great River Energy and SEA have therefore identified a need to upgrade an existing distribution substation and transmission line to improve and maintain reliable service on the distribution grid in this area.

The project will include constructing a new transmission line termination structure and replacing the existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transformer with a new 115 kV transformer at the St. Stephen Substation, and rebuilding approximately 1.25 miles of the ST-SST line to 115 kV. A project description/site map is enclosed for your information.

Great River Energy is seeking approval for the project from Stearns County. As part of the permitting process, Stearns County must prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) on the project and afford the public an opportunity to participate in the development of the scope of the EA before it is prepared.

The attached survey is intended to allow the public to comment on the project and provide input on the content of the EA. A preliminary Table of Contents for the EA is attached as a starting point for what should be covered in the EA. We encourage you to provide comments on the project and additional topics you want to see addressed in the EA.

Great River Energy requested environmental review of the project from several federal and state agencies. The status of those reviews is provided below.

United States Corps of Engineers – general information letter, specific comments to be provided once design details are available (letter of 12/4//14).

United States Fish and Wildlife Service – still waiting for a response.

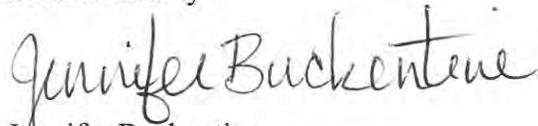
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – concurred that the project will not negatively affect any known occurrences of rare features (e-mail of 1/9/15).

Minnesota Historical Society – no properties listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and no known or suspected archaeological properties in the area will be affected by this project (letter of 11/21//14).

Minnesota Department of Transportation (aviation issues) – no concerns related to the proposed project (email of 11/25/14).

Thank you for your input on this project. Please return your survey form in the self-addressed envelope provided by February 17, 2015. As an alternative, you may email the survey form to Jennifer.buckentine@co.stearns.mn.us.

Sincerely,
Stearns County



Jennifer Buckentine
Senior Environmental Specialist

Enclosures

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SURVEY:

Please respond by February 17, 2015 via the enclosed self-addressed envelope or email to Jennifer.buckentine@co.stearns.mn.us

I have the following comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project: (Please write your comments below. Use another sheet of paper if more space is needed.)

I have No comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

SURVEY:

Please respond by February 17, 2015 via the enclosed self-addressed envelope or email to Jennifer.buckentine@co.stearns.mn.us

I have the following comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project: (Please write your comments below. Use another sheet of paper if more space is needed.)

UNNAMED CREEK IS STONY CREEK BECAUSE IN 1987 I HAD IT CLEANED OUT WITH LEGAL PERMIT IT CROSSED 131 OR 410TH ST TO THE SOUTH OF 131 OR 410TH ST. THE OTHER WATER WAY CROSSING 131 OR 410TH ST. IS A COUNTY DITCH I DON'T KNOW THE NUMBER. THERE IS A PROTECTED WATER WAY FROM STONY CREEK WEST OF 100TH ALONG 131 OR 410TH ST.

CALL PAT SMOLEY
CELL 320-250-9181

I HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH IT GOING THROUGH.

I have No comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____



Smoley
9789 County Road 131
Rice, MN 56367-9410

RECEIVED

FEB 02 2015

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

SURVEY:

Please respond by February 17, 2015 via the enclosed self-addressed envelope or email to Jennifer.buckentine@co.stearns.mn.us

I have the following comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project: (Please write your comments below. Use another sheet of paper if more space is needed.)

If you need more power -
we are in favor of it

I have No comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project

Name: Richard Mayauski
Address: 9494 Co. Rd. 131, Rice MN 56367
Phone: (320) 251-8655

RECEIVED

FEB 02 2015

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

SURVEY:

Please respond by February 17, 2015 via the enclosed self-addressed envelope or email to Jennifer.buckentine@co.stearns.mn.us

I have the following comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project: (Please write your comments below. Use another sheet of paper if more space is needed.)

I have No comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project

Name: David Friedrich chair 02.10.15
Address: _____
Phone: _____

RECEIVED
FEB 25 2015
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Brockway Township
Zoning Administrator's Office
43710 - 85th Avenue
Rice, MN 56367

RECEIVED

FEB 24 2015

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

SURVEY:

Please respond by February 17, 2015 via the enclosed self-addressed envelope or email to Jennifer.buckentine@co.stearns.mn.us

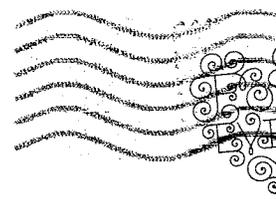
I have the following comments on the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project: (Please write your comments below. Use another sheet of paper if more space is needed.)

I have wanted to send this in as Rick Herring was to come out to show me how this project would impact on me. It was very cold when he prepared to come I have not had his call to reschedule, I am very close to these high voltage proposed lines.

9285 SCR 131
Rice, Mn 56367

MINNEAPOLIS MN 553

23 FEB 2015 PM 2 L



COUNTY OF STEARNS
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
ADMINISTRATION CENTER, RM 343
705 COURTHOUSE SQUARE
ST. CLOUD, MN 56303

56303470199

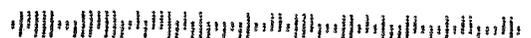


Exhibit C

Agency Correspondence



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ENERGY®

12300 Elm Creek Boulevard • Maple Grove, Minnesota 55369-4718 • 763-445-5000 • Fax 763-445-5050 • greatriverenergy.com

October 30, 2014

Mr. Dan Boerner
Office of Aeronautics
Minnesota Department of Transportation
222 E. Plato Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55107-1618

RE: Proposed St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade
Stearns County, Minnesota

Dear Mr. Boerner:

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment (1.25 miles) of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the City of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area. The attached fact sheet/map provides details on the proposed project.

The project is located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23, T126N, R29W. After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 13. In most cases, round wood transmission structures will be used that will range in height from 60 to 80 feet above ground.

Great River Energy is requesting information on the possible effects of the proposed project on airports or airstrips in the project area. The proposed project is nearly 16 miles from the St. Cloud Regional Airport.

We would appreciate receiving any written comments from your office by Friday, November 28, 2014. If you have any questions about this proposed project, please contact me at (763) 445-5214. If you wish to respond by e-mail, my address is cschmidt@greenergy.com.

Thank you for your attention to this important project.

Sincerely,

GREAT RIVER ENERGY

Carole L. Schmidt

Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance

Attachment: Fact Sheet/Project Map

s:\legal\environmental\transmission\projects\St. Stephen Conversion\ Agency Correspondence\St. StephenMnDOTltr.doc

St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade



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A Xcel Energy Company

GREAT RIVER ENERGY
12300 Elm Creek Blvd
Maple Grove, MN 55369-4718
763-445-5000
www.greatriverenergy.com



STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION
900 E. Kraft Drive, P.O. Box 40
Melrose, MN 56352-0040
320-256-4241
www.stearnselectric.org

Project Description/Need

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV, and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the city of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minn. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area.

Great River Energy currently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation (see map on back). The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

Proposed Project

This project will include constructing a new transmission line termination structure and replacing the existing 69 kV transformer with a new 115 kV transformer at the St. Stephen Substation, and rebuilding approximately 1.25 miles of the ST-SST line to 115 kV. The project also includes installing a steel monopole 3-way switch at the proposed interconnection with Xcel Energy's 115 kV "0868" transmission line (at 100th Avenue). The new 115 kV transmission line will utilize 477 ACSR conductor attached to single wood poles 60-80 feet in height (see photo). The spacing between the new poles will be approximately 400 feet.

Proposed Route

After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 131 (see map on back).

Project Schedule

Great River Energy will seek approval for this project through Stearns County.

Public contacts and/or notifications -----	Fall 2014
Project permitting -----	Late 2014 - early 2015
Survey/design -----	2015
Easement acquisition/right-of-way permits -----	2015
Transmission line construction -----	2016
Energization -----	Summer 2016



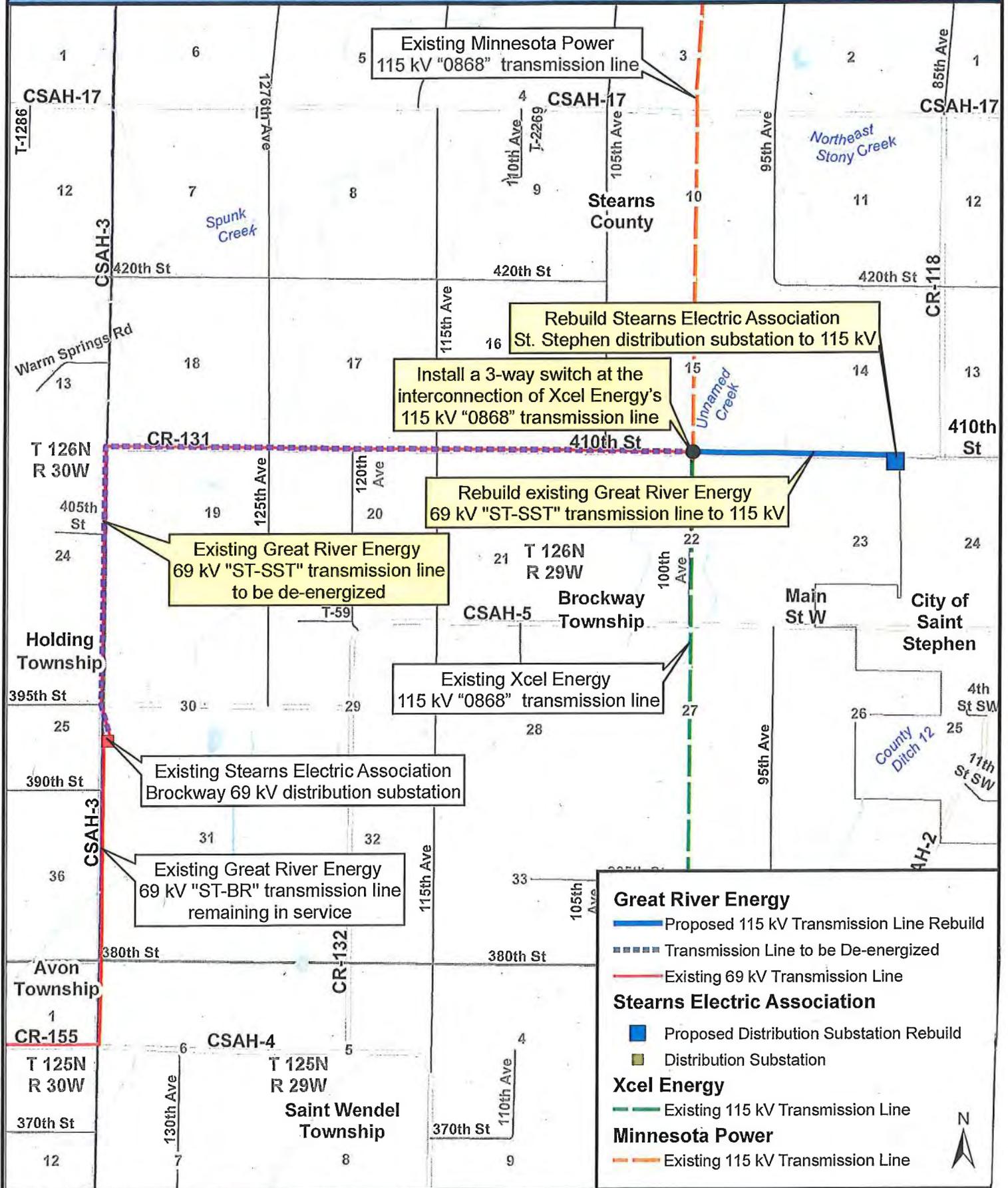
Typical 115 kV Wood Structure

For project updates and information, please contact:

Rick Heuring
Great River Energy
(763) 445-5979
rheuring@greenergy.com

Tim Weir
Stearns Electric Association
(320) 256-1604
tweir@stearnselectric.org

Proposed Project



Great River Energy

- Proposed 115 kV Transmission Line Rebuild
- - - - Transmission Line to be De-energized
- Existing 69 kV Transmission Line

Stearns Electric Association

- Proposed Distribution Substation Rebuild
- Distribution Substation

Xcel Energy

- Existing 115 kV Transmission Line

Minnesota Power

- Existing 115 kV Transmission Line



Schmidt, Carole GRE-MG

From: Boerner, Daniel (DOT) [dan.boerner@state.mn.us]
Sent: Tuesday, November 25, 2014 3:14 PM
To: Schmidt, Carole GRE-MG
Subject: No concerns with the St Stephen 115 KV upgrade ...

Hi Carole,

I have read the proposal for the St Stephen 115KV transmission line upgrade. I have no concerns related to the proposed project.

Dan



Daniel P. Boerner, PE
Regional Airport Engineer
Mn/DOT • Office of Aeronautics

Mail Stop 410
222 East Plato Blvd. • St. Paul, MN 55107-1618
Office: (651) 234-7244 • Fax: (651) 296-9089
Email: dan.boerner@state.mn.us



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October 30, 2014

Ms. Sarah Beimers, Manager
Government Programs and Compliance
Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office
345 Kellogg Boulevard West
St. Paul, MN 55102-1906

RE: Proposed St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade
Stearns County, Minnesota

Dear Ms. Beimers:

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment (1.25 miles) of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the City of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area. The attached fact sheet/map provides details on the proposed project.

The project is located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23, T126N, R29W. After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 13.

Merjent conducted a Phase 1A Cultural Resources Assessment of the proposed project (see attached letter). Merjent found no information regarding previously recorded archaeological sites or historic structures in the project area and supports the finding that there will be no adverse impact on known or suspected cultural resources as a result of the project.

The project will likely **not** require a Section 404 permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE), therefore we do not believe it will be necessary for the COE to initiate Section 106 requirements and consult with the SHPO under your joint Programmatic Agreement.

Ms. Sarah Beimers
October 30, 2014
Page 2

We would appreciate receiving any written comments from your office by Friday, November 28, 2014. If you have any questions about this proposed project, please contact me at (763) 445-5214. If you wish to respond by e-mail, my address is cschmidt@greenergy.com.

Thank you for your attention to this important project.

Sincerely,

GREAT RIVER ENERGY



Carole L. Schmidt
Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance

Attachments: Fact Sheet/Project Map, Letter of 10-29-14 from Merjent

s:\legal\environmental\transmission\projects\St. Stephen Conversion/ Agency Correspondence/St. Stephen SHPOLtr.doc

St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade



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900 E. Kraft Drive, P.O. Box 40
Melrose, MN 56352-0040
320-256-4241
www.stearnselectric.org

Project Description/Need

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV, and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the city of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minn. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area.

Great River Energy currently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation (see map on back). The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

Proposed Project

This project will include constructing a new transmission line termination structure and replacing the existing 69 kV transformer with a new 115 kV transformer at the St. Stephen Substation, and rebuilding approximately 1.25 miles of the ST-SST line to 115 kV. The project also includes installing a steel monopole 3-way switch at the proposed interconnection with Xcel Energy's 115 kV "0868" transmission line (at 100th Avenue). The new 115 kV transmission line will utilize 477 ACSR conductor attached to single wood poles 60-80 feet in height (see photo). The spacing between the new poles will be approximately 400 feet.

Proposed Route

After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 131 (see map on back).

Project Schedule

Great River Energy will seek approval for this project through Stearns County.

Public contacts and/or notifications -----	Fall 2014
Project permitting -----	Late 2014 - early 2015
Survey/design -----	2015
Easement acquisition/right-of-way permits -----	2015
Transmission line construction -----	2016
Energization -----	Summer 2016



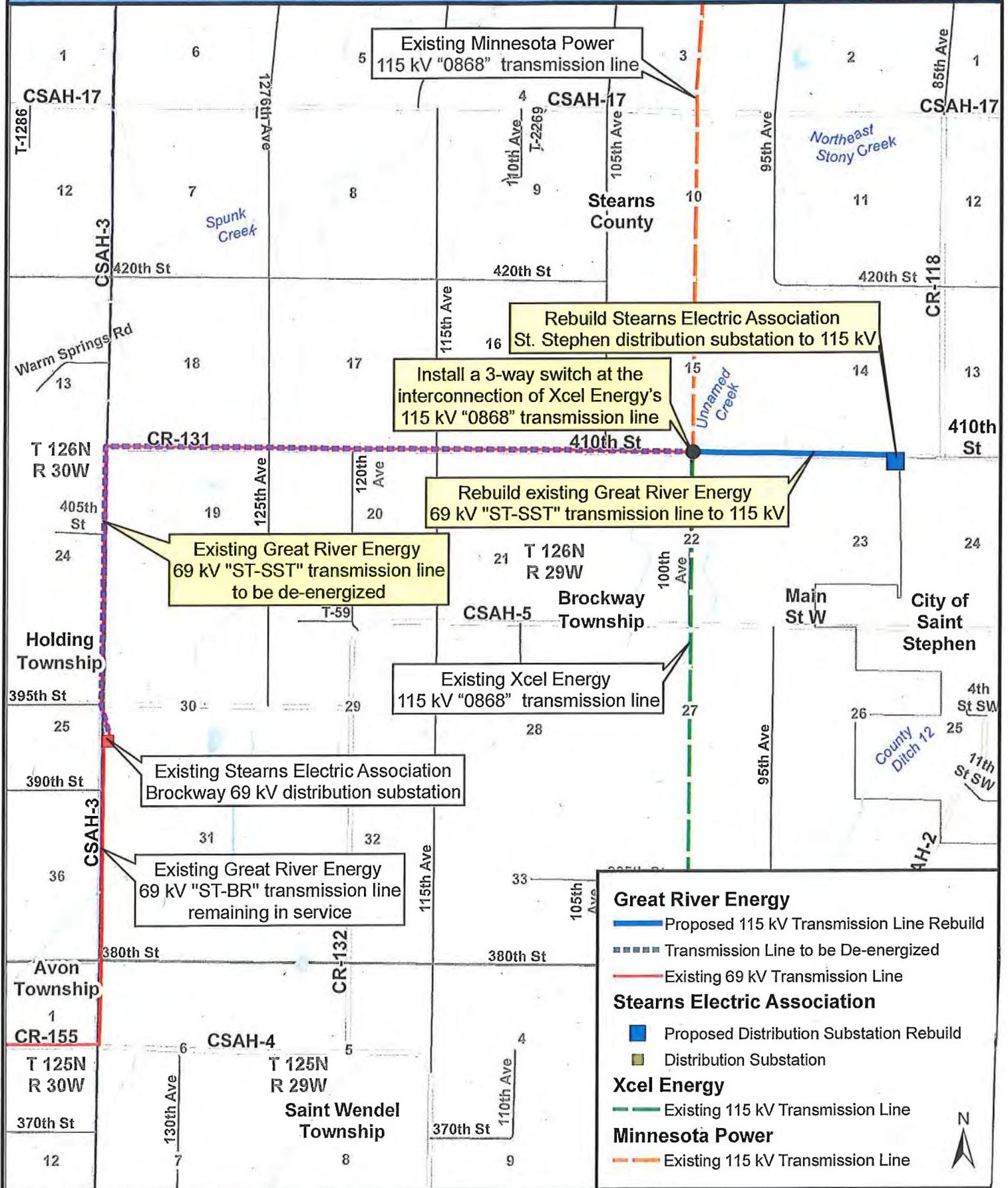
Typical 115 kV Wood Structure

For project updates and information, please contact:

Rick Heuring
Great River Energy
(763) 445-5979
rheuring@greenergy.com

Tim Weir
Stearns Electric Association
(320) 256-1604
tweir@stearnselectric.org

Proposed Project



Great River Energy

- Proposed 115 kV Transmission Line Rebuild
- - - - Transmission Line to be De-energized
- Existing 69 kV Transmission Line

Stearns Electric Association

- Proposed Distribution Substation Rebuild
- Distribution Substation

Xcel Energy

- - - - Existing 115 kV Transmission Line

Minnesota Power

- - - - Existing 115 kV Transmission Line





October 29, 2014

Carole Schmidt
Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance
Great River Energy
12300 Elm Creek Boulevard
Maple Grove, MN 56369-4718

Re: Phase IA Archaeological Assessment of the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Stearns County, Minnesota.

Dear Carole:

Merjent was contacted in October 2014 by Great River Energy to conduct a Phase IA Archaeological Assessment of the proposed St. Stephen 115kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project (Project). The line is being upgraded to improve electric system reliability in the existing local electric system. The proposed construction site for the facilities is located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23 of Township 126 North, Range 29 West in Stearns County, Minnesota.

Project Description

The proposed project consists of upgrading the St. Stephen distribution substation from 69 kV to 115 kV and replacing approximately 1.25 miles of 69 kV transmission line with 115 kV west of the substation near the City of St. Stephen, Minnesota.

Literature Review

The main objective in reviewing the cultural resources literature is to identify the recorded cultural sites and assess the potential for unrecorded sites within a given study area. The standard for considering a cultural property as significant is whether it meets the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The initial criterion for such listing is an age of 50 or more years. Beyond age, a property must retain integrity and be associated with significant historic trends, historic persons, building styles and craftsmanship, or the property must have the potential to provide significant information about the past.

Merjent reviewed and followed the published guidelines for conducting cultural resources literature reviews in Minnesota. The Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), located in the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, is the record keeper for the state's prehistoric and historic archaeological site files, historic standing structure inventory files, and field survey reports. The Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA), located at Fort Snelling History Center in St. Paul, maintains the records for burial sites within the State.

Merjent examined the current topographic and aerial photo-based maps to understand the modern land use of the Project area and to provide a baseline for examining the historic maps and documents. Several online

resources were used to gather information. Merjent staff collected general information online about Stearns County and the City of St. Stephen. They also examined primary sources that have been digitized and made available online, such as the original land survey maps and the original land patent records.

Merjent Senior Cultural Resource Specialist Dean T. Sather examined site files maintained at the OSA and the SHPO in October 2014.

Previously Recorded Archaeological Resources

An examination of cultural resource investigations conducted within the defined Project area yielded no information regarding previously recorded archaeological sites.

Previously Recorded Standing Historic Structures

A review of the History/Architecture Inventory Files at SHPO was conducted to identify inventoried historic structures recorded within the Project area. This review yielded no information regarding previously recorded/inventoried standing structures.

Conclusion

Merjent supports the finding that there will be no adverse impact on known or suspected cultural resources as a result of this project. Merjent stresses that if construction plans are altered to affect areas that were not previously surveyed or disturbed, these locations should be examined for cultural resources. Further, if human remains are encountered during construction activities, all ground disturbing activity must cease and local law enforcement must be notified. Minnesota Statute 307.08, the Private Cemeteries Act, prohibits the intentional disturbance of human burials.

Please contact us if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Merjent, Inc.



Dean T. Sather, MA, RPA
Sr. Cultural Resource Specialist

RECEIVED NOV 24 2014



Using the Power of History to Transform Lives
PRESERVING > SHARING > CONNECTING

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

November 21, 2014

Ms. Carole Schmidt
Transmission Permitting & Compliance
Great River Energy
12300 Elm Creek Blvd.
Maple Grove, MN 55369-4718

RE: St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade
T126 R29 S14, 15, 22, 23, Stearns County
SHPO Number: 2015-0472

Dear Ms. Schmidt:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the above project. It has been reviewed pursuant to the responsibilities given the Minnesota Historical Society by the Minnesota Historic Sites Act and the Minnesota Field Archaeology Act.

Based on our review of the project information, we conclude that there are **no properties** listed in the National or State Registers of Historic Places, and no known or suspected archaeological properties in the area that will be affected by this project.

Please note that this comment letter does not address the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and 36CFR800, Procedures of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for the protection of historic properties. If this project is considered for federal assistance, or requires a federal permit or license, it should be submitted to our office by the responsible federal agency.

Please contact our Compliance Section at (651) 259-3455 if you have any questions regarding our review of this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Sarah J. Beimers'.

Sarah J. Beimers, Manager
Government Programs and Compliance



12300 Elm Creek Boulevard • Maple Grove, Minnesota 55369-4718 • 763-445-5000 • Fax 763-445-5050 • greatriverenergy.com

October 30, 2014

Ryan Malterud
US Army Corps of Engineers
St. Paul District
180 5th Street East, Suite 700
St. Paul, MN 55101-1678

RE: Proposed St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade
Stearns County, Minnesota

Dear Mr. Malterud:

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment (1.25 miles) of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the City of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area. The attached fact sheet/map provides details on the proposed project.

The project is located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23, T126N, R29W. After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 13.

Great River Energy is requesting information on the possible effects of the proposed project on floodplains, wetlands, and other important natural resources that occur in the project area. The transmission line will span one DNR public water (two crossings of 73P - see enclosed map). Great River Energy will apply to the DNR Division of Lands and Minerals for a license to cross that water.

The project will cross a few NWI wetlands (see enclosed map); however, if it is necessary to place poles in wetlands, it is anticipated that the amount of fill required will not trigger a Corps of Engineers permit. Great River Energy will file any required paperwork with the Corps and Stearns County once design details are available.

A literature survey of cultural resources in the project area was conducted by Merjent. Merjent found no information regarding previously recorded archaeological sites or historic structures in the project area and supports the finding that there will be no adverse impact on known or suspected cultural resources as a result of the project (see attached letter).

Mr. Ryan Malterud

October 30, 2014

Page 2

We would appreciate a response to this request by Friday, November 28, 2014. If you require further information or have questions regarding this project, please feel free to call me at 763-445-5214. If you wish to respond by e-mail, my address is cschmidt@greenergy.com. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

GREAT RIVER ENERGY



Carole L. Schmidt

Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance

Attachments: Fact Sheet/Project Map, NWI/PWI Maps, Merjent Letter

s:\legal\environmental\transmission\projects\St. Stephen Conversion/ Agency Correspondence/St. StephenCOEtr.doc

St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade



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Great River Energy currently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation (see map on back). The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

Proposed Project

This project will include constructing a new transmission line termination structure and replacing the existing 69 kV transformer with a new 115 kV transformer at the St. Stephen Substation, and rebuilding approximately 1.25 miles of the ST-SST line to 115 kV. The project also includes installing a steel monopole 3-way switch at the proposed interconnection with Xcel Energy's 115 kV "0868" transmission line (at 100th Avenue). The new 115 kV transmission line will utilize 477 ACSR conductor attached to single wood poles 60-80 feet in height (see photo). The spacing between the new poles will be approximately 400 feet.

Proposed Route

After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 131 (see map on back).

Project Schedule

Great River Energy will seek approval for this project through Stearns County.

Public contacts and/or notifications -----	Fall 2014
Project permitting -----	Late 2014 - early 2015
Survey/design -----	2015
Easement acquisition/right-of-way permits -----	2015
Transmission line construction -----	2016
Energization -----	Summer 2016



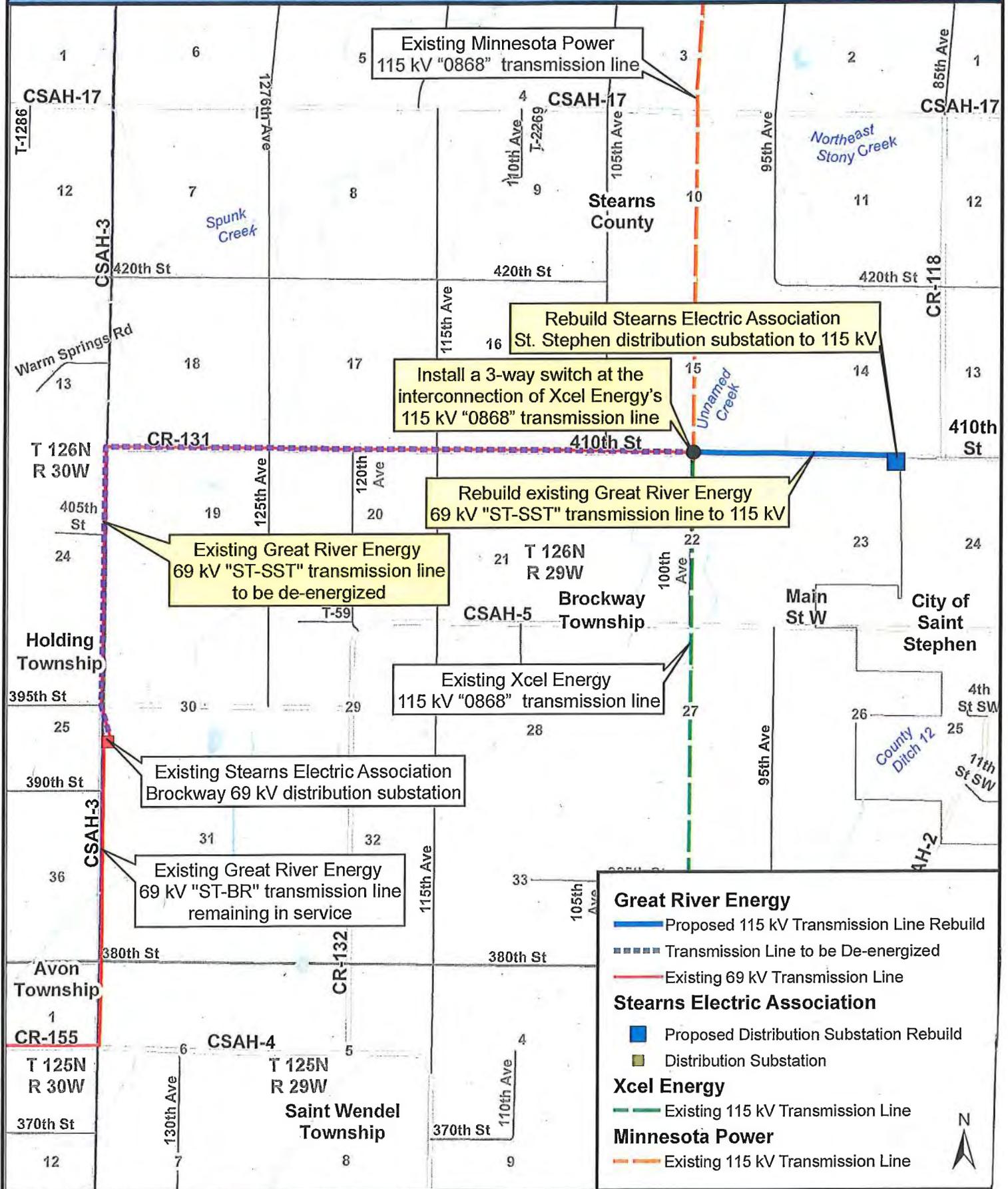
Typical 115 kV Wood Structure

For project updates and information, please contact:

Rick Heuring
Great River Energy
(763) 445-5979
rheuring@greenergy.com

Tim Weir
Stearns Electric Association
(320) 256-1604
tweir@stearnselectric.org

Proposed Project



Great River Energy

- Proposed 115 kV Transmission Line Rebuild
- - - - Transmission Line to be De-energized
- Existing 69 kV Transmission Line

Stearns Electric Association

- Proposed Distribution Substation Rebuild
- Distribution Substation

Xcel Energy

- - - - Existing 115 kV Transmission Line

Minnesota Power

- - - - Existing 115 kV Transmission Line





October 29, 2014

Carole Schmidt
Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance
Great River Energy
12300 Elm Creek Boulevard
Maple Grove, MN 56369-4718

Re: Phase IA Archaeological Assessment of the St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Stearns County, Minnesota.

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Project Description

The proposed project consists of upgrading the St. Stephen distribution substation from 69 kV to 115 kV and replacing approximately 1.25 miles of 69 kV transmission line with 115 kV west of the substation near the City of St. Stephen, Minnesota.

Literature Review

The main objective in reviewing the cultural resources literature is to identify the recorded cultural sites and assess the potential for unrecorded sites within a given study area. The standard for considering a cultural property as significant is whether it meets the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The initial criterion for such listing is an age of 50 or more years. Beyond age, a property must retain integrity and be associated with significant historic trends, historic persons, building styles and craftsmanship, or the property must have the potential to provide significant information about the past.

Merjent reviewed and followed the published guidelines for conducting cultural resources literature reviews in Minnesota. The Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), located in the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, is the record keeper for the state's prehistoric and historic archaeological site files, historic standing structure inventory files, and field survey reports. The Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA), located at Fort Snelling History Center in St. Paul, maintains the records for burial sites within the State.

Merjent examined the current topographic and aerial photo-based maps to understand the modern land use of the Project area and to provide a baseline for examining the historic maps and documents. Several online

resources were used to gather information. Merjent staff collected general information online about Stearns County and the City of St. Stephen. They also examined primary sources that have been digitized and made available online, such as the original land survey maps and the original land patent records.

Merjent Senior Cultural Resource Specialist Dean T. Sather examined site files maintained at the OSA and the SHPO in October 2014.

Previously Recorded Archaeological Resources

An examination of cultural resource investigations conducted within the defined Project area yielded no information regarding previously recorded archaeological sites.

Previously Recorded Standing Historic Structures

A review of the History/Architecture Inventory Files at SHPO was conducted to identify inventoried historic structures recorded within the Project area. This review yielded no information regarding previously recorded/inventoried standing structures.

Conclusion

Merjent supports the finding that there will be no adverse impact on known or suspected cultural resources as a result of this project. Merjent stresses that if construction plans are altered to affect areas that were not previously surveyed or disturbed, these locations should be examined for cultural resources. Further, if human remains are encountered during construction activities, all ground disturbing activity must cease and local law enforcement must be notified. Minnesota Statute 307.08, the Private Cemeteries Act, prohibits the intentional disturbance of human burials.

Please contact us if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Merjent, Inc.



Dean T. Sather, MA, RPA
Sr. Cultural Resource Specialist

RECEIVED DEC 08 2014



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
ST. PAUL DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
180 FIFTH STREET EAST, SUITE 700
ST. PAUL MINNESOTA 55101-1678

DEC 04 2014

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF
Operations
Regulatory (2014-04057-RMM)

Ms. Carole Schmidt
Great River Energy
12300 Elm Creek Boulevard
Maple Grove, Minnesota 55369

Dear Ms. Schmidt:

This letter responds to your request for comments about a project of Great River Energy proposing to rebuild a short segment of an existing 69 kilovolt (kv) transmission line to 115 kv and of Stearns Electric association to convert an existing 69 kv substation to operate at 115 kv near the City of St. Stephen. The project site is Sec. 14, 15, 22 and 23, T. 126N., R. 29W., Stearns County, Minnesota.

The placement of aerial lines that cross navigable waters of the U.S. requires authorization under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act.

Underground utility lines through waters of the U.S., including wetlands, as well as navigable waters of the U. S. are regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act if there is a discharge of dredged or fill material. Any discharge would require authorization by a general permit or letter of permission.

Underground lines installed by vibratory plow and directional bore method through waters of the U.S., including wetlands, do not involve a discharge and a permit is not required. However, if installation of connecting points requires excavation and backfill in waters of the U.S., including wetlands, a permit would be required.

The placement of poles, overhead wiring, and/or buried wiring at upland locations is not within the jurisdiction of the Corps of Engineers, provided the work does not involve the placement of dredged or fill material into any waterbody or wetland.

Temporary placement of fill material into any waterbody or wetland for purposes such as bypass roads, temporary stream crossings, cofferdam construction, or storage sites may require a Department of the Army permit.

If any of the proposed projects would involve the placement of fill material, either permanent or temporary, please notify our office.

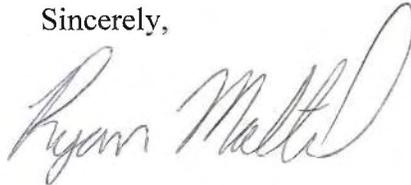
Without detailed construction plans, we cannot provide specific comments regarding the effects that the proposed activity would have on aquatic resources.

You may also need city, county, or State permits for the project. You should contact the appropriate agencies for their permit requirements. If the project includes the placement of dredged or fill material in a Federal regulated waterbody, we will notify the responsible State agency for water quality (401) certification.

You should also contact the State Historical Preservation Officer (SHPO) to determine if there are any known historic or archeological sites in the area or if any cultural resource survey would be required.

If you have any questions, please contact me in our St. Paul office at (651) 290-5286. In any correspondence or inquiries, please refer to the Regulatory number shown above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ryan Malterud".

Ryan Malterud
Project Manager



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December 16, 2014

Ms. Lisa Joyal
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program
500 Lafayette Road, Box 25
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Proposed St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade
Stearns County, Minnesota

Dear Ms. Joyal:

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment (1.25 miles) of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the City of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area. The enclosed fact sheet/map provides details on the proposed project. Great River Energy is seeking a conditional use permit for the project through Stearns County.

The project is located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23, T126N, R29W. After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 13.

The upgraded transmission line will span one DNR public water (two crossings of 73P - see enclosed Hydrologic Features map). Great River Energy will apply to the DNR Division of Lands and Minerals for a license to cross that water once design details are available.

As shown on the enclosed Rare Features map, there are no rare features along the rebuild route. There is a site of high biodiversity significance, an area of lowland white cedar forest and an area of willow dogwood swamp to the southwest of the line, but the rebuild project will not affect these areas. Great River Energy is therefore seeking concurrence from the DNR regarding our assessment of no impacts to rare features in the Project area.

Ms. Lisa Joyal
December 16, 2014
Page 2

We would appreciate receiving any written comments from your office by Friday, January 9, 2015.

If you have any questions about this proposed project, please contact me at (763) 445-5214. If you wish to respond by e-mail, my address is cschmidt@greenergy.com. Thank you for your attention to this important project

Sincerely,

GREAT RIVER ENERGY



Carole L. Schmidt
Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance

Enclosures: Fact Sheet/Project Map, Hydrologic Features Map, Rare Features Map

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St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade



GREAT RIVER ENERGY
12300 Elm Creek Blvd
Maple Grove, MN 55369-4718
763-445-5000
www.greatriverenergy.com



STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION
900 E. Kraft Drive, P.O. Box 40
Melrose, MN 56352-0040
320-256-4241
www.stearnselectric.org

Project Description/Need

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV, and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the city of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minn. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area.

Great River Energy currently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation (see map on back). The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

Proposed Project

This project will include constructing a new transmission line termination structure and replacing the existing 69 kV transformer with a new 115 kV transformer at the St. Stephen Substation, and rebuilding approximately 1.25 miles of the ST-SST line to 115 kV. The project also includes installing a new 3-way switch structure at the proposed interconnection with an existing 115 kV transmission line (at 100th Avenue). The new 115 kV transmission line will utilize 477 ACSR conductor attached to single wood poles 60-80 feet in height (see photo). The spacing between the new poles will be approximately 400 feet.

Proposed Route

After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 131 (see map on back).

Project Schedule

Great River Energy will seek approval for this project through Stearns County.

Public contacts and/or notifications -----	Fall 2014
Project permitting -----	Late 2014 - early 2015
Survey/design -----	2015
Easement acquisition/right-of-way permits -----	2015
Transmission line construction -----	2016
Energization -----	Summer 2016



Typical 115 kV Wood Structure

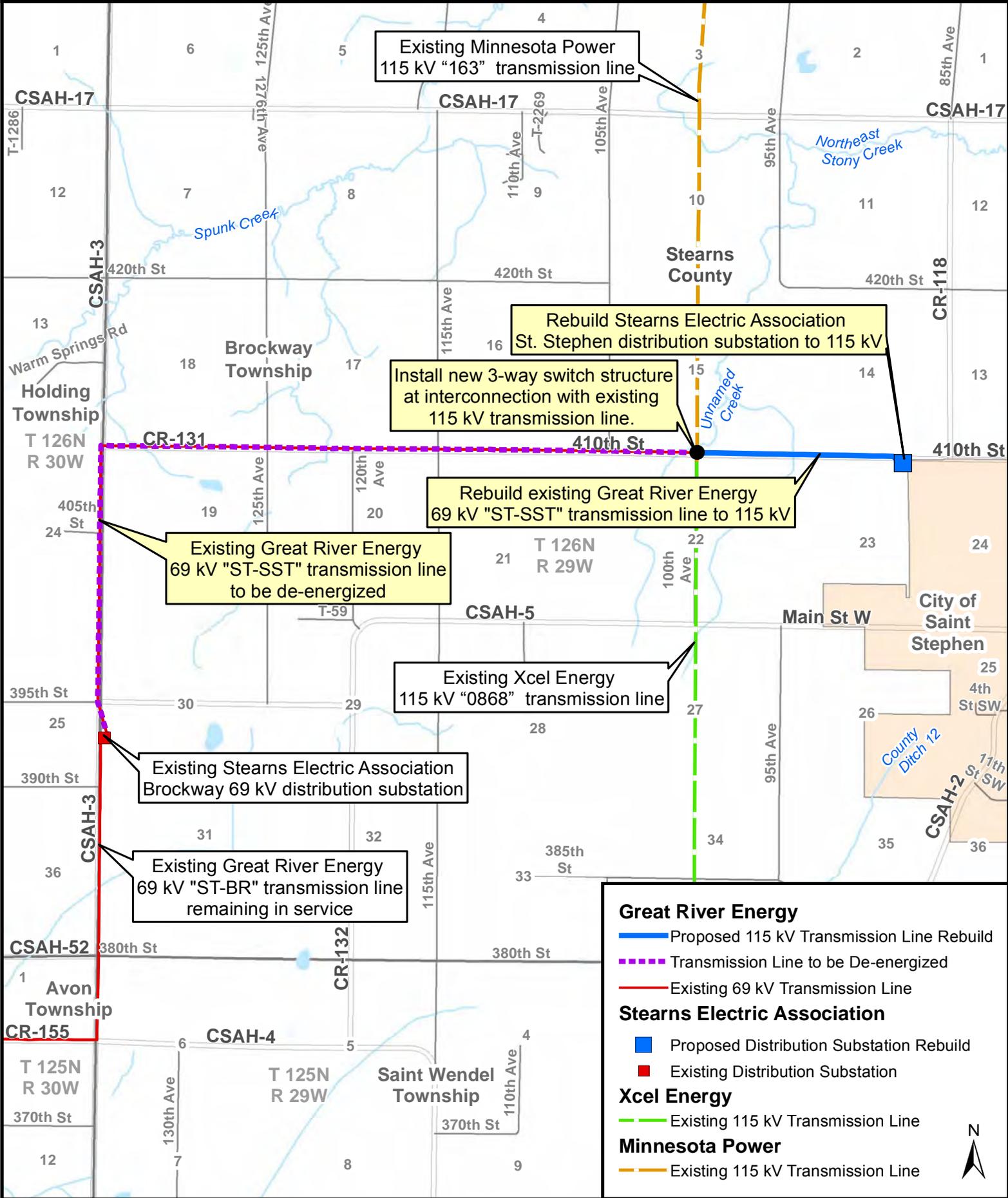
For project updates and information, please contact:

Rick Heuring
Great River Energy
(763) 445-5979
rheuring@greenergy.com

Tim Weir
Stearns Electric Association
(320) 256-1604
tweir@stearnselectric.org

Date last revised: 12/16/2014

Proposed Project





GREAT RIVER ENERGY

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

- Proposed Great River Energy 115 kV Transmission Line
- Existing Great River Energy 69 kV Transmission Line
- Existing Cooperative Distribution Substation
- Rare Natural Feature (NHS)
- Protection Status
- Not listed
- Sites of Biodiversity Significance
- High
- MN Native Plant Community

Updated: 12/16/2

Data Sources vary between MNDOT, MNDNR, MNGEO and Great River Energy. Rare Features Heritage data from MNDNR.

Topo scanned image maps from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) ESRI Basemap service. Map Projection: UTM, NAD83, Zone 15, Meters. Copyright (2011), State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources. Rare features are not based on an aerial photograph and are subject to change. Geographic area shall not be construed to indicate that no significant features are present.

0 250 500 750 1,000 Feet

St. Stephen ST-SST Rebuild 115 kV Transmission Line Project

Rare Features



Schmidt, Carole GRE-MG

From: Joyal, Lisa (DNR) [Lisa.Joyal@state.mn.us]
Sent: Friday, January 09, 2015 8:55 PM
To: Schmidt, Carole GRE-MG
Subject: St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade

I have reviewed your assessment of the potential for the above project to impact rare features, and concur with your assessment.

Thank you for notifying us of this project, and for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Lisa Joyal

~~~~~  
Lisa Joyal  
Endangered Species Review Coordinator  
NHIS Data Distribution Coordinator  
Division of Ecological and Water Resources  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
500 Lafayette Road, Box 25  
St. Paul, MN 55155

phone: 651-259-5109  
[lisa.joyal@state.mn.us](mailto:lisa.joyal@state.mn.us)  
[www.mndnr.gov/eco](http://www.mndnr.gov/eco)





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16 December 2014

Mr. Andrew Horton, Habitat Conservation Biologist  
United States Department of the Interior  
Twin Cities Field Office  
4101 East 80th Street  
Bloomington, MN 55425-1665

RE: Proposed St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade  
Stearns County, Minnesota

Dear Mr. Horton:

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment (1.25 miles) of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the City of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minnesota. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area. The enclosed fact sheet/map provides details on the proposed project. Great River Energy is seeking a conditional use permit for the project through Stearns County.

The project is located in Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23, T126N, R29W. After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 13.

The Fish and Wildlife Service website list for threatened and endangered species includes the Northern long-eared\_bat (proposed as endangered) in Stearns County. Great River Energy does not believe the proposed transmission project will affect this species, but should it be listed, guidance associated with the bat will be considered. The DNR Rare features database indicates there are no rare features along the route (see enclosed Rare Features map).

The existing line crosses the USFWS Brockway WPA Tract 80 in Section 14, T1216N, R29W. The USFWS granted permission to overhang power lines over this tract provided no poles were set on the property and the crossing was at approximately 50 feet north of the centerline of Stearns County Road 13 (see enclosed letter dated April 20, 1973). Great River Energy respectfully seeks the same permission with the same conditions for the upgraded transmission line.

Mr. Andrew Horton  
16 December 2014  
Page 2

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Great River Energy is requesting concurrence or information on the possible effects of the proposed project on any listed or proposed threatened or endangered species and designated or proposed critical habitat that may be present in the project area as well as permission to rebuild the line across the Brockway WPA. The proposed project does not represent a "major construction activity" as defined in 50 CFR 402.02.

We would appreciate receiving any written comments from your office by Friday, January 9, 2015. If you have any questions about this proposed project, please contact me at (763) 445-5214. If you wish to respond by e-mail, my address is [cschmidt@greenergy.com](mailto:cschmidt@greenergy.com).

Sincerely,

GREAT RIVER ENERGY



Carole L. Schmidt  
Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance

Enclosures: Fact Sheet/Project Map, Rare Features Map, USFWS Letter of 4-20-73

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# St. Stephen 115 kV Transmission Line Upgrade



**GREAT RIVER ENERGY**  
12300 Elm Creek Blvd  
Maple Grove, MN 55369-4718  
763-445-5000  
[www.greatriverenergy.com](http://www.greatriverenergy.com)



**STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION**  
900 E. Kraft Drive, P.O. Box 40  
Melrose, MN 56352-0040  
320-256-4241  
[www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org)

## Project Description/Need

Great River Energy, wholesale electric supplier to Stearns Electric Association (SEA), is proposing to rebuild a short segment of existing 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to 115 kV, and SEA is proposing to convert an existing 69 kV substation to operate at 115 kV near the city of St. Stephen in Stearns County, Minn. The system upgrade is needed to improve electric system reliability in the area.

Great River Energy currently operates the 69 kV "ST-SST" transmission line that extends 4.75 miles west from SEA's St. Stephen distribution substation and then continues 1.75 miles south to the SEA Brockway distribution substation (see map on back). The upgrade of the easternmost 1.25 miles of this transmission line to 115 kV and the conversion of the St. Stephen distribution substation to 115 kV will provide improved reliability to both the St. Stephen and Brockway distribution substations. The westernmost 5.25 miles of the existing "ST-SST" line will be de-energized and left standing in its present location to potentially provide transmission service in the future.

## Proposed Project

This project will include constructing a new transmission line termination structure and replacing the existing 69 kV transformer with a new 115 kV transformer at the St. Stephen Substation, and rebuilding approximately 1.25 miles of the ST-SST line to 115 kV. The project also includes installing a new 3-way switch structure at the proposed interconnection with an existing 115 kV transmission line (at 100<sup>th</sup> Avenue). The new 115 kV transmission line will utilize 477 ACSR conductor attached to single wood poles 60-80 feet in height (see photo). The spacing between the new poles will be approximately 400 feet.

## Proposed Route

After exiting the SEA St. Stephen distribution substation, the new 115 kV transmission line will follow the same route as the existing 69 kV transmission line along the north side of Stearns County Road 131 (see map on back).

## Project Schedule

Great River Energy will seek approval for this project through Stearns County.

|                                                 |                        |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Public contacts and/or notifications -----      | Fall 2014              |
| Project permitting -----                        | Late 2014 - early 2015 |
| Survey/design -----                             | 2015                   |
| Easement acquisition/right-of-way permits ----- | 2015                   |
| Transmission line construction -----            | 2016                   |
| Energization -----                              | Summer 2016            |



*Typical 115 kV Wood Structure*

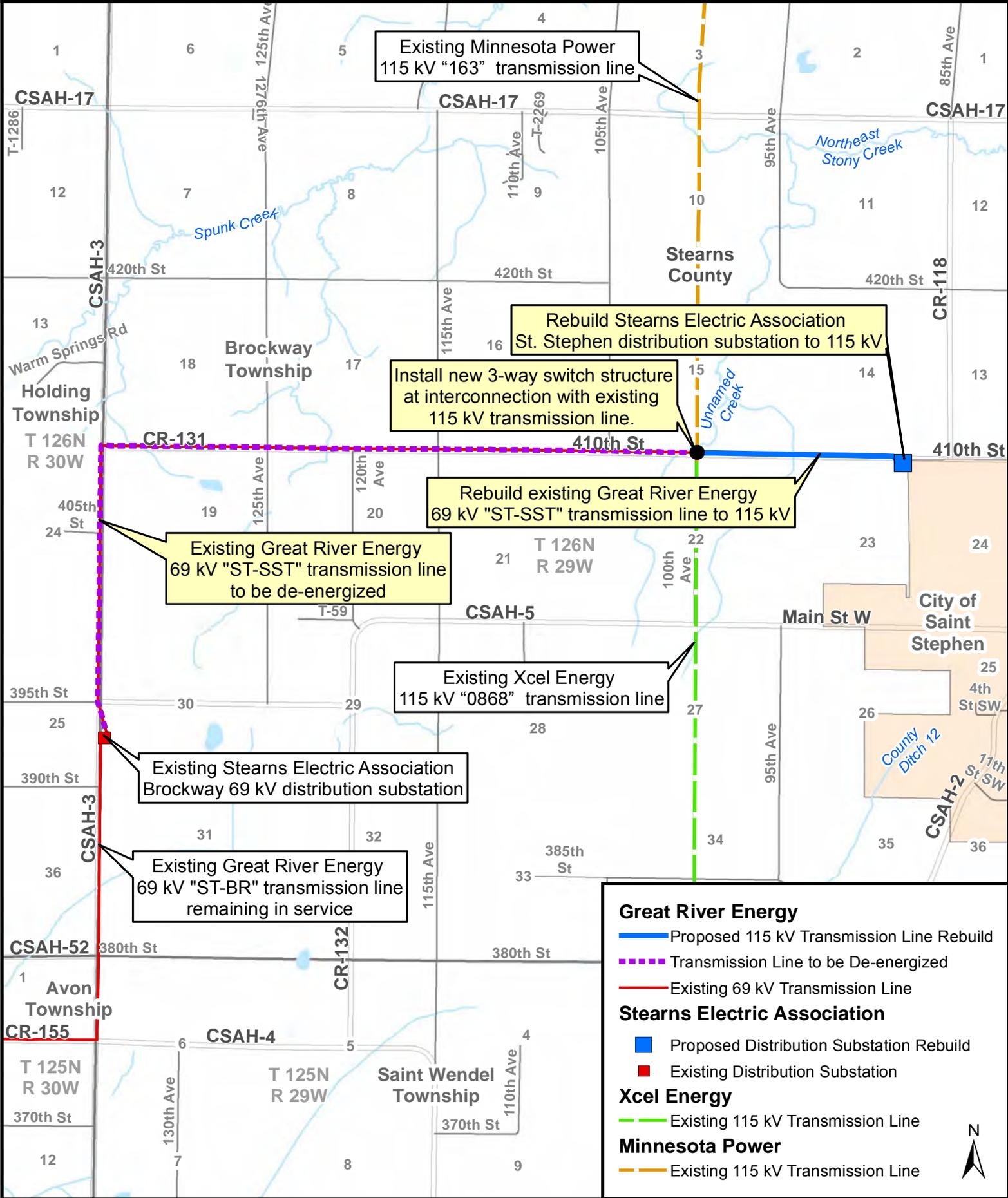
## For project updates and information, please contact:

Rick Heuring  
Great River Energy  
(763) 445-5979  
[rheuring@greenergy.com](mailto:rheuring@greenergy.com)

Tim Weir  
Stearns Electric Association  
(320) 256-1604  
[tweir@stearnselectric.org](mailto:tweir@stearnselectric.org)

Date last revised: 12/16/2014

# Proposed Project





GREAT RIVER ENERGY

A. Touchstone Energy Cooperative

- Proposed Great River Energy 115 kV Transmission Line
- Existing Great River Energy 69 kV Transmission Line
- Existing Cooperative Distribution Substation
- Rare Natural Feature (NHS) Protection Status
- Sites of Biodiversity Significance
- MN Native Plant Community

Updated: 12/16/20

Data Sources vary between MNDOT, MNDNR, MNGEO and Great River Energy and Great River Energy Rare Features Heritage data from MNDNR

Topo scanned image maps from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) ESRI Baseemap service

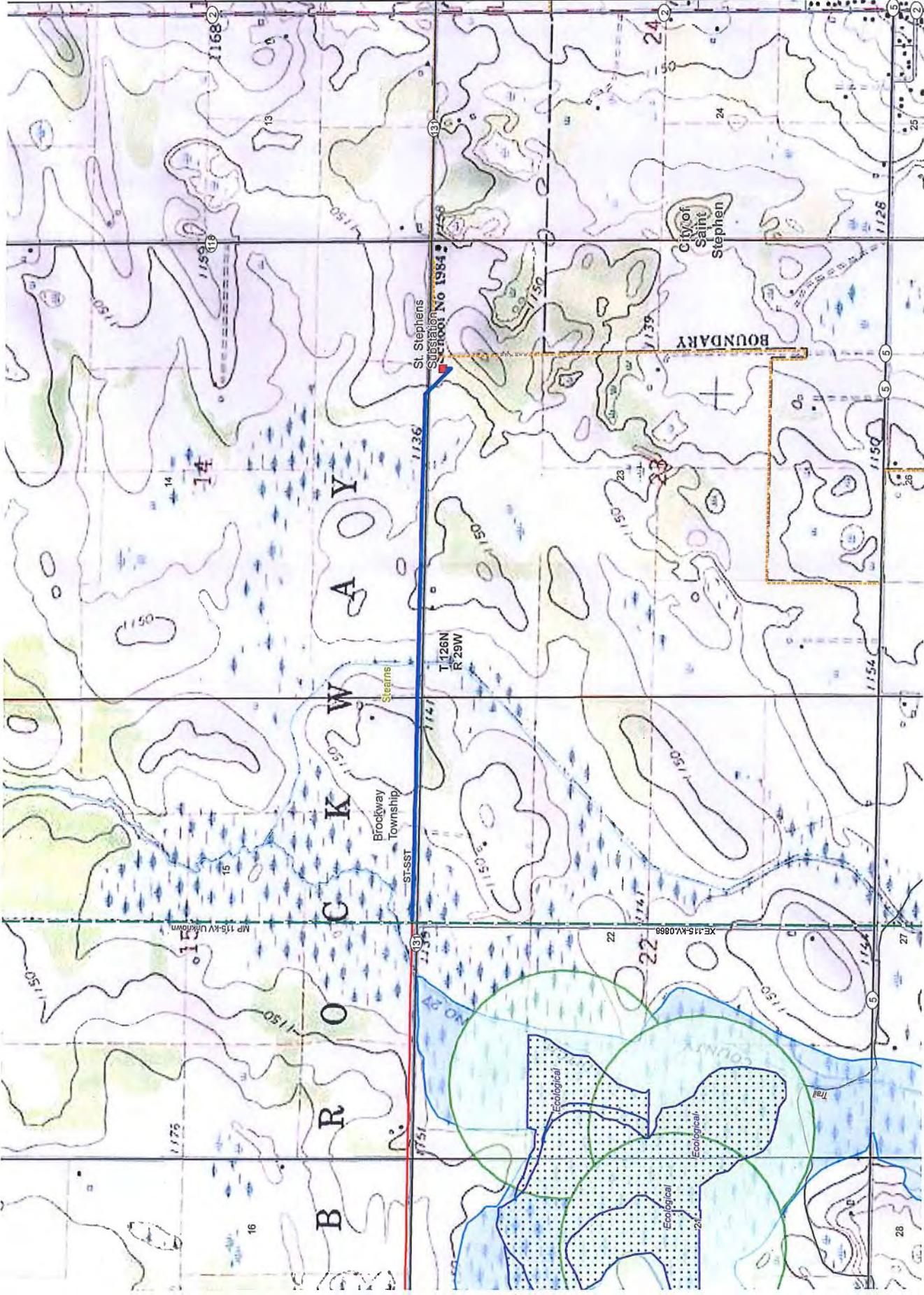
Map Projection: UTM, NAD83, Zone 15, Meters

Copyright (2011) State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Rare list data included here were provided by the Division of Ecological Resources Minnesota Department of Natural Resources DNR, and were current as of 12/16/20. The inventory of the state. The lack of data for geographic area shall not be construed to that no significant features are present.

0 250 500 750 1,000 Feet

St. Stephen ST-SST Rebuild 115 kV Transmission Line Project

Rare Features





# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
Federal Building, Fort Snelling  
Twin Cities, Minnesota 55111

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
LM-RE - Minnesota W.A.  
Stearns  
(E2) Cooperative Power  
Association

April 20, 1973

RECEIVED

APR 24 1973

COOPERATIVE POWER

Mr. J. C. Kingrey  
Land Use Coordinator  
Cooperative Power Association  
6700 France Avenue South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55435

Dear Mr. Kingrey:

We have carefully reviewed your letter of March 15, requesting our consideration of the crossing of Stearns County WPA Tract (80) in a part of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 14, T 126 N, R 29 W, 5th P.M. in Stearns County, Minnesota with a 69 KV transmission line.

Permission is hereby granted to the Cooperative Power Association to overhang power lines over the Stearns County WPA Tract (80). There will be no poles set on the Bureau property and the crossing will be at approximately 50 feet north of the centerline of Stearns County Road No. 131.

We appreciate your patience in this matter and your willingness to cooperate.

Sincerely yours,

Charles A. Hughlett  
Acting Regional Director

## Schmidt, Carole GRE-MG

---

**From:** Horton, Andrew [andrew\_horton@fws.gov]  
**Sent:** Friday, January 30, 2015 8:10 AM  
**To:** Schmidt, Carole GRE-MG  
**Cc:** Scott Glup  
**Subject:** Re: St. Stephen Upgrade

Carole,

I have reviewed the proposed transmission line upgrade project (03E19000-2015-TA-0058) located in Section 14, 15, 22 and 23, Township 126N, Range 29W, Stearns County, Minnesota. Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) is located in Stearns County, however, our records indicate there are no federally listed or proposed species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat within the action area of the proposed project. The proposed route crosses the southern boundary of Brockway WPA and is within the existing Right of Way (ROW) approved by the Service in 1973. We recommend working with the Litchfield Wetland Management District's Project Leader, Scott Glup to ensure that the ROW boundaries are clearly identified and that a special use permit is not needed for this project. Based on the materials provided and conversations with you, it is understood that poles will not be set on the property and the height of the power poles are only anticipated to increase by 10-15 feet. For the portion of the line that crosses Section 14, Township 126N, Range 29W, we recommend bird flight diverters be placed on the line to reduce the likelihood of bird strikes.

If project plans change, additional information on listed or proposed species becomes available, or new species are listed that may be affected by the project, our office should be contacted. This concludes our technical assistance review of the proposed construction at the above location. If you have any further endangered species questions, please contact me at (612) 725-3548 x2208.

Andrew Horton  
Twin Cities Ecological Services Field Office  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
4101 American Blvd East  
Bloomington, MN 55425-1665  
(612) 725-3548 ext. 2208

On Mon, Jan 19, 2015 at 9:16 AM, Schmidt, Carole GRE-MG <[cschmidt@greenergy.com](mailto:cschmidt@greenergy.com)> wrote:

Hi Andy – will you be responding on this project soon? We are getting underway with permitting with Stearns County and would appreciate having a response for the EA. I sent the materials to you on 12-16, let me know if you need anything additional. Thanks - Carole

*Carole L. Schmidt*

*Supervisor, Transmission Permitting and Compliance*

*Great River Energy*

*12300 Elm Creek Blvd.*

*Maple Grove, MN 55369*

763-445-5214

[cschmidt@greenergy.com](mailto:cschmidt@greenergy.com)

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