

# Hampton–Rochester–La Crosse 345 kV Transmission System Improvement Project

## Scoping Report February 2010



United States Department of Agriculture  
Rural Development  
Washington, DC



## Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1-1</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Agency Scoping Meetings .....</b>	<b>2-1</b>
2.1	Purpose .....	2-1
2.2	Notification.....	2-1
2.3	Agency Attendance .....	2-1
2.4	Section 106 Consultation.....	2-2
2.5	Agency Comments .....	2-2
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Public Scoping Meetings .....</b>	<b>3-1</b>
3.1	Purpose .....	3-1
3.2	Notifications .....	3-1
3.3	Public Scoping Meeting Materials.....	3-2
3.4	Public Comments .....	3-2
3.4.1	Form Letters .....	3-3
3.4.2	Agriculture .....	3-3
3.4.3	Biological Resources .....	3-3
3.4.4	Connected Action .....	3-4
3.4.5	Conservation Easements .....	3-4
3.4.6	Cumulative Impacts.....	3-4
3.4.7	Electrical Characteristics .....	3-4
3.4.8	Environmental Justice .....	3-5
3.4.9	Geology and Soils .....	3-5
3.4.10	Health and Safety.....	3-5
3.4.11	Historic and Cultural .....	3-5
3.4.12	Interconnection to Generation .....	3-6
3.4.13	Land Rights and Easement Acquisition.....	3-6
3.4.14	Land Use .....	3-6
3.4.15	Noise .....	3-6
3.4.16	Process .....	3-7
3.4.17	Project Alternatives.....	3-7
3.4.18	Public Facilities or Uses .....	3-7
3.4.19	Purpose and Need.....	3-7
3.4.20	Recreation .....	3-8
3.4.21	Residential.....	3-8
3.4.22	River Crossings .....	3-8
3.4.23	Route Alternatives .....	3-8

3.4.24	Social and Economic .....	3-12
3.4.25	Transportation and Access .....	3-13
3.4.26	Visual.....	3-13

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Project Schedule .....</b>	<b>1</b>
------------	-------------------------------	----------

**Appendices**

Appendix A:	Notice of Intent
Appendix B:	Public Meeting Newspaper Notices
	Legal Ads
	Display Ads
	Affidavit of Publication
Appendix C:	Newsletter/Public Mailer
Appendix D:	Agency Letters/Meeting Invitation
	D-1 Federal and State Agency Letter and List of Recipients
	D-2 Local Governments Letter and List of Recipients
	D-3 Tribal Leader Letter and List of Recipients
Appendix E:	Agency Sign-In
Appendix F:	Public Scoping Meeting Sign-In
Appendix G:	Public Scoping Meeting Materials
Appendix H:	Public Scoping Comment Form
Appendix I:	Individual, Business, and Non-Government Organization Comment Index and Comments and Responses
	Index of Public Comments by Category
	Public Comments and Responses
Appendix J:	Tribal and Agency Comment Index and Comments and Responses
	Index of Agency and Tribal Comments by Category
	Agency and Tribal Comments and Responses

**Tables**

Table 1.1-1:	Newspapers and Dates of Public Notices.....	1-2
Table 3.0-1:	Public Scoping Meetings – June 2009.....	3-1

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

AES	Alternative Evaluation Study
CapX2020	CapX2020 Transmission Expansion Initiative
C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations
D.P.C.	Dairyland Power Cooperative
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EMF	electric and magnetic fields
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
GIS	geographic information system
MCBS	Minnesota County Biological Survey
MCS	Macro Corridor Study
kV	kilovolt
MN DNR	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Mn/DOT	Minnesota Department of Transportation
MN PUC	Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
NAGPRA	Native American Graves Protection Repatriation Act
NHIS	National Heritage Information System
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NOI	Notice of Intent
NPS	National Park Service
NSPM	Northern States Power Company, a Minnesota Corporation
NSPW	Northern States Power Company, a Wisconsin Corporation
PSCW	Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
ROW	Right-of-Way
RPU	Rochester Public Utilities
RUS	Rural Utilities Service
SMMPA	Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
WDNR	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WPPI	Wisconsin Public Power, Inc.



## 1.0 Introduction

Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) intends to seek funding from the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Utilities Programs, for its anticipated ownership interest in the Hampton–Rochester–La Crosse Transmission System Improvement Project. The project is one of four transmission line projects proposed by CapX2020 utilities. CapX2020 is a regional joint initiative of 11 transmission owning utilities whose goal is to study, develop, permit and construct transmission improvements in Minnesota and the surrounding region needed to meet energy demands to the year 2020. The CapX2020 utilities involved with this project include:

- Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC)
- Northern States Power Company, a Minnesota corporation (NSPM), and Northern States Power Company, a Wisconsin corporation (NSPW) (collectively, Xcel Energy)
- Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA)
- Rochester Public Utilities (RPU)
- WPPI Energy, Inc. (WPPI)

The proposed project consists of constructing a 345 kilovolt (kV) transmission line and associated infrastructure between Hampton, Minnesota, and the La Crosse area in Wisconsin. The project also includes construction of new 161 kV transmission lines and associated facilities in the area of Rochester, Minnesota and La Crosse, Wisconsin. The total length of 345 kV and 161 kV transmission lines associated with the proposed project would be approximately 150 miles.

RUS funding of the proposed project would constitute a federal action subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] § 4321, specifically 7 C.F.R. § 1794.3) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), 16 U.S.C. § 470F, and its implementing regulations, “Protection of Historic Properties” (36 CFR Part 800). RUS determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was necessary to assess the potential for significant impacts prior to making a decision regarding whether to fund DPC’s ownership interest in the Project. The EIS process is conducted with the intent to adequately integrate the Section 106 and (NEPA) process. This is shown on the Federal Review Process diagram in section 4.0. This scoping report summarizes comments provided by the public during the scoping period and is indicative of what will be evaluated in the EIS required pursuant to 7 C.F.R. § 1794.

The Alternative Evaluation Study (AES) and the Macro Corridor Study (MCS) are two preliminary documents required by RUS when conducting an environmental analysis for proposed transmission line project. These documents provide agencies and the public with a general understanding of the proposed project. The AES explains the need for the proposed project and discusses the alternative methods that have been considered to meet that need and which alternative is considered the best for fulfilling the need. The MCS defines the study area and defines the project end points. Within the study area, macro-corridors are developed based on environmental, engineering, economic, and land use data as well as consideration of permitting constraints. These documents are available on the RUS website (<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>) or by request to RUS.

A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the *Federal Register* on May 28, 2009, informing the public of RUS's intent to prepare an EIS and the dates for public scoping meetings during June 2009. A copy of the NOI is provided in Appendix A. Notices printed in local newspapers in the weeks preceding public scoping meetings, including a large display ad which identified meeting times and locations, and a legal notice similar to the NOI was also published as required by RUS guidance. A list of the names of the publications and dates of these advertisements is included in Table 1.1-1. Copies of the newspaper ads are included in Appendix B.

**Table 1.1-1:  
Newspapers and Dates of Public Notices**

Newspaper	State	Publication Dates
Stewartville Star	Minnesota	June 2, 2009
La Crosse Tribune	Minnesota	June 3, 2009
Winona Daily News	Minnesota	June 3, 2009
Winona Post	Minnesota	June 3, 2009
Zumbrota News-Record	Minnesota	June 3, 2009
Kenyon Leader	Minnesota	June 3, 2009
Rochester Post-Bulletin	Minnesota	June 3, 2009
Wabasha County Herald	Minnesota	June 3, 2009
Cannon Falls Beacon	Minnesota	June 4, 2009
Houston County News—La Crescent	Minnesota	June 4, 2009
Lewiston Journal	Minnesota	June 4, 2009
Plainview News	Minnesota	June 4, 2009
St. Charles Press	Minnesota	June 4, 2009
Buffalo County Journal	Wisconsin	June 4, 2009
Arcadia News-Leader	Wisconsin	June 4, 2009
Cochrane-Fountain City Recorder	Wisconsin	June 4, 2009
Galesville Republican	Wisconsin	June 4, 2009
Onalaska Community Life and Holmen Courier	Wisconsin	June 5, 2009
Farmington/Lakeville This Week	Minnesota	June 5, 2009

A public mailer was distributed to landowners and other individuals who requested to be on the project mailing list. . The mailing list was developed initially using county landowner data for the original study area. Contact information was added throughout the project when data was provided by stakeholders at public meetings. A copy of this mailer is included in Appendix C.



---

## 2.0 Agency Scoping Meetings

RUS conducted two agency scoping meetings with federal, state and local agencies and tribal representatives that included a presentation and an interactive question-and-answer session. The agency meetings were held on June 17, 2009, at the Wanamingo Community Center, located at 401 Main Street, Wanamingo, Minnesota, and on June 24, 2009, at the Radisson Hotel in La Crosse, Wisconsin, located at 200 Harborview Plaza, La Crosse, Wisconsin. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) have requested to be cooperating agencies during the EIS process. RUS will act as the lead federal agency and prepare an EIS jointly with the USFWS and USACE. Each Federal agency will independently develop its own decision document.

### 2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the agency scoping meeting was to introduce the RUS NEPA process and provide a status of the proposed project to attending federal, state, and local agency representatives as well as tribal representatives. Project and RUS staff provided information on the project, required permitting processes, data collection, routing methodology and potential impacts that could result from the project. All information provided to the public was also available at the agency scoping meetings.

### 2.2 Notification

RUS notified the federal, state, and local agency representatives by sending letters to an RUS approved list of individual representatives. A preliminary list was created by DPC after which RUS recommended additions; DPC added the suggested contacts that were included in the final notice letter mail out. Federal and state agencies received a letter detailing RUS's role in the project, the availability of the AES and MCS, the dates and locations of the public and agency scoping meetings, contact information for the RUS representative assigned to the project, and methods for submitting comments. Local agency and government representatives were sent similar letters that included a request for information regarding the presence of low income and minority populations. A copy of a sample of the federal and state agency letter, the local government letter, the Tribal letter, and the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer letters and list of recipients for each are included in Appendix D.

### 2.3 Agency Attendance

Representatives of the following agencies attended the agency scoping meeting in Wanamingo, Minnesota: US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MNPUC), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (Mn DNR), Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT)-District 6, Minnesota Office of Energy Security, Minnesota Department of Commerce, Minnesota legislators, and representatives from Goodhue County, the City of Wanamingo, the City of Cannon Falls, and Cherry Grove Township.

Representatives of the following agencies attended the agency scoping meeting in La Crosse, Wisconsin: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSCW), La Crosse County, La Crosse County Zoning and Planning Department, the City of La Crosse, the City of Onalaska, and the City of Onalaska Planning Department.

Sign-in sheets from the agency scoping meetings are included as Appendix E.

## 2.4 Section 106 Consultation

Tribal leaders and the Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) received letters with similar information provided to the agencies as well as information on the Section 106 consultation process. A representative of the Shakopee Dakota Tribe attended the agency scoping meeting in Wanamingo, Minnesota, and is included on the agency sign-in sheet in Appendix E. The following tribes submitted comments during the scoping period: Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Ketegitigaaning Ojibwe Nation, Ho-Chuck Nation, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Stockbridge Munsee, and Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians. The comment forms or letters and the RUS responses are included in Appendix J. Section 106 consultation is ongoing throughout the EIS process.

## 2.5 Agency Comments

The following federal and state agencies provided written comments: the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), National Park Service (NPS), MNPUC, Mn/DOT, PSCW, Mn DNR, and Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission, and WDNR. Senator Sharon Erikson Ropes of the Minnesota State Senate provided comments. The following local governments provided written comments: Goodhue County, La Crosse County, Farmington Township, New Market Township, Highland Township, Warren Township, the City of Hampton, Holden Township, and Bridgewater Township. An index and record of all agency and tribal items with delineated comments and corresponding RUS responses is included in Appendix J. Appendices I and J include an index of all comments by category. The indexes show each comment that was considered under each of the categories described in section 3.4.

### 3.0 Public Scoping Meetings

RUS conducted six public scoping meetings listed in Table 3.0-1 using an open-house format between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. CDT (local time) beginning June 17, 2009, through June 26, 2009, at the following locations:

Table 3.0-1:  
Public Scoping Meetings – June 2009

Date	Location	Number of Attendees
June 16	Plainview–Elgin–Millville High School 500 West Broadway Plainview, Minnesota	162
June 17	Wanamingo Community Center 401 Main Street Wanamingo, Minnesota	77
June 18	City of St. Charles Community Meeting Room 830 Whitewater Avenue St. Charles, Minnesota	59
June 23	La Crescent American Legion 509 N. Chestnut La Crescent, Minnesota	49
June 24	Centerville/Town of Trempealeau Community Center West 24854 State Road 54/93 Galesville, Wisconsin	82
June 25	Cochrane-Fountain City High School South 2770 State Road 35 Fountain City, Wisconsin	31

### 3.1 Purpose

The purpose and objective of the public scoping meetings was to provide the public with information regarding the purpose and need for the project, provide a project description, identify possible sites and/or corridor routes, discuss the scope of environmental issues to be analyzed, answer questions the public may have regarding the project and the environmental analysis process, and solicit public comments.

### 3.2 Notifications

Several methods were used to notify the public of the scoping process and public meetings, including those required by RUS as well as the direct mail newsletters and the project website used by DPC to provide additional outreach to the public and stakeholders in the project area. The NOI, published in the *Federal Register* on May 28, 2009, served to notify the public of RUS’s intent to prepare an EIS and hold

public scoping meetings. A legal notice and newspaper ads were printed June 2, 2009, through June 5, 2009. Mailers were sent to landowners in the project area to inform them of the public scoping meetings. These materials are included in Appendix A, B, and C.

### 3.3 Public Scoping Meeting Materials

The public scoping meetings were held on weeknights after regular business hours to allow people with a range of daily commitments to attend. An open house format was used to facilitate discussion and information sharing and to ensure that the public had opportunities to speak with a project staff. Fourteen stations were staffed by either representatives of RUS, DPC, Xcel Energy, WPPI, RPU, SMMPA, or consultants of DPC/Xcel Energy. Informational stations at the meetings included the following:

- Sign-in and Welcome
- RUS Station and NEPA process
- State permitting processes
- Project Background, including display boards on project description, purpose and need, the CapX 2020 Initiative, and conservation and renewable energy
- Transmission structures and land rights and right-of-way acquisition
- Large project map
- Routing process display board and video
- Mississippi River existing transmission line crossing photos
- Environmental resources
- GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping and print-out station
- Transmission line construction video
- Public comment tables, including large sheet maps with detailed routes for mark-up and comment forms

Sign-in sheets and comment forms were made available to all scoping meeting attendees. Copies of the public scoping meeting sign-in sheets are included in Appendix F, and all public scoping meeting materials are included in Appendix G. A copy of the public comment form is included in Appendix H.

### 3.4 Public Comments

A total of 1135 comments from 359 commenters were received during the scoping comment period beginning on May 28, 2009, ending on July 25, 2009. Public comments were submitted using comment forms, letters, emails, online comment form submission, and phone-calls. Some of the comments made at the public scoping meetings were recorded on project route maps, and documented later by digitizing with GIS and including in the public comment database. The public comments and RUS responses are included in Appendix I. Some of the comments submitted were, in whole or part, identical form letters.

A summary of the public comments received and organized by category is provided below. Each of these were referred to as an item and entered into the comment management database. The items were indexed based on the source of the comments including; Federal agency (F), state agency (S), local agency (L), Tribe (T), non-government organization (N), business (B), or individual (I). The item was cataloged with a number based on the order it was received by RUS (e.g., I-076) and each comment

associated with an item was given a unique number (e.g., I-076-001). An index and record of all items with delineated comments and corresponding RUS responses is included in Appendices I (individual, business, and non-government organizations) and J (agencies and tribes). The appendices also contain an index that shows each comment that was considered under each of the categories described below.

### ***3.4.1 Form Letters***

There were two distinct form letters submitted, one regarding the Sky Harbor Airpark, located in the Brookings County to Hampton 345 kV project area, and one regarding environmental impacts of ultra or high voltage transmission lines. The Sky Harbor Airpark is not located within the Hampton–Rochester–La Crosse Transmission System Improvement Project area.

Sixteen (16) letters were submitted regarding the Sky Harbor Airpark that were, in whole or part, identical. I-172 and I-173 are identical, and the first three paragraphs of I-236 and I-251 are identical to those of item B-018 (which closes with a personal note). Common themes include the number and types of craft using the field, FAA and Minnesota Department of Aeronautics regulations, and potential hazards. Two letters reference work with USFWS on wildlife habitat. The following items consider the Sky Harbor Airpark: B-018, I-111, I-112, I-115, I-138, I-140, I-144, I-172, I-173, I-203, I-227, I-229, I-230, I-236, I-244, and I-251.

Three letters regarding environmental impacts contained two identical paragraphs regarding updated forecasts of electrical peak demand and lists of types of environmental harm (I-201, I-215, and I-132). Two of those letters were identical in additional details.

### ***3.4.2 Agriculture***

Thirty-seven (37) comments were received on various aspects of agriculture. General concerns include the loss of productive farmland and revenue associated with production, interference with farming equipment and operations, compaction of soil, and the health and safety of livestock especially dairy cattle. Several commenters suggested preserving agricultural land, prime and unique farmland, family farms, and organic farms. Specific comments were submitted regarding the impact to operations including tile drainage and possible destruction, center pivot irrigation systems, and the aerial application of chemicals. Commenters also questioned the ability of farms to navigate farm equipment around transmission line structures and if compensation for damages and losses would be provided by the utilities.

### ***3.4.3 Biological Resources***

Sixty-six (66) comments were received on biological resources including wildlife, fish, vegetation, habitat, wetlands, and biodiversity. Commenters requested that direct and indirect impacts to biological resources be analyzed and mitigation measures, including vegetation management and the control of invasive plant species, be discussed in the EIS. One comment also suggested that impacts to hunted wildlife be analyzed in the EIS. Mn DNR requests that in the impact analysis, the project team use data from the Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS), including data from the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) Plant Communities, Sites of Biodiversity Significance, and Railroad Rights-of-Way Prairies. Mn

DNR also requested that Habitat and Rare Species Surveys be conducted if any native prairie remnants or other special status species habitat could be affected by the proposed project.

There were concerns about impacts to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and the Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood State Forest. Commenters recommended that these areas be avoided. Questions regarding the impacts on specific plant and animal species including state and federally listed species were raised including short-tailed weasels, American bald eagles, Henslow's sparrows, loggerhead shrikes, prairie voles, trout lily, wild ginger, prairie bush clover, and kitten tails. In addition, comments were received questioning the impacts to old growth forests, and clear cutting of vegetation when clearing the ROW. Another specific commenter was concerned about bird mortality related to collisions with transmission lines in the Mississippi River flyway.

#### ***3.4.4 Connected Action***

Eight (8) comments were received regarding other projects that might be considered connected actions to the proposed project. Two commenters suggested that the EIS include all four CapX2020 transmission projects because they were studied and developed as a whole. Another commenter suggested that, at a minimum, the Brookings County to Hampton project be analyzed in the EIS for Hampton – Rochester – La Crosse because the projects are electrically connected at the proposed Hampton Substation. Other comments concerning connected actions discuss the potential impact related to coal generation to be connected to the project.

#### ***3.4.5 Conservation Easements***

Six (6) comments were received regarding conservation easements. The commenters requested that land in conservation easements be avoided and the potential impacts assessed if the project passed through a conservation easement. Specific concerns include easements in Oakwood Township, Minnesota and land enrolled in the Minnesota Land Stewardship Program.

#### ***3.4.6 Cumulative Impacts***

Nine (9) comments were received on cumulative impacts related to the project. Two commenters asked that property already hosting a pipeline, specifically the Williams pipeline or an existing transmission line easement, not be burdened with additional utility easements. One commenter questioned the cumulative impact to migratory birds and waterfowl if another transmission line were to be added within a flyway. A commenter questioned the cumulative impacts that would result if this energy project were potentially enabling new coal generation in the Dakotas and how would that impact global warming. Another commenter requested that the cumulative impacts of new wind farm development correlated to the final route alignment for the proposed project be analyzed in the EIS.

#### ***3.4.7 Electrical Characteristics***

Nineteen (19) comments were received regarding electrical characteristics of the project. Most comments were requesting more information about the characteristics of electric and magnetic fields (EMF). Some of the commenters suggested that EMF would cause electrical interference with farm and communication equipment, especially GPS-driven farm equipment. There were also questions about the compensation

and mitigation be provided by the utilities if interference does occur. Other comments were regarding the potential effects EMF may have on humans and livestock. Comments also included static electricity and stray voltage issues, and how those would be mitigated.

### ***3.4.8 Environmental Justice***

Three (3) comments were received regarding environmental justice. A resident of Trempealeau County submitted a comment concerning proper and timely notification of the project for that area. The comment indicated that the population in Trempealeau County is small and displays low income characteristics and the residents would be uniquely disadvantaged. Other commenters questioned why the project would be routed in rural land and affect rural landowners when users in urban centers would be the principal beneficiaries of the project.

### ***3.4.9 Geology and Soils***

Fourteen (14) comments were received on geology and soil resources. The majority of the comments requested that sensitive and erodible soils and geologic features such as sinkholes and underground limestone caverns be avoided when routing the project. One commenter specifically requested that Pine Creek and Root River, which flooded, experienced mudslides, and were designated Federal Disaster Areas two years ago, be avoided by the project. Other commenters requested that the bluffs and other sensitive areas surrounding the Mississippi River, Black River, and Cannon River be avoided so that these sensitive features are not impacted by the project. It was also requested that mitigation of soil compaction and damage caused during construction and operation of the project be considered in the EIS.

### ***3.4.10 Health and Safety***

Ninety-four (94) comments were received regarding health and safety concerns related to the project. Several commenters requested that the EIS include assessment of detrimental direct and indirect impacts on human and animal health related to exposure to stray voltage or EMF emissions from a transmission line and include mitigation measures such as burying the transmission line. The commenters also spoke to the lack of sufficient information and conclusive studies on the connection between health effects and EMF, and requested that the EIS address the possible correlations. Specific diseases including cancer, adult and childhood leukemia, chronic fatigue syndrome, Alzheimer's disease, sudden infant death syndrome, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, breast cancer, and a general increase in health risks were mentioned. Another commenter questioned the effect of EMF on pacemakers and defibrillators. Comments regarding the potential loss of production of dairy herd grazing in close proximity to a transmission lines were also received. Other health and safety comments included concerns about accidents, catastrophic failure due to adverse weather, being shocked by operating farm equipment under a transmission line, and clearance required to safely operate equipment under a transmission line.

### ***3.4.11 Historic and Cultural***

Nineteen (19) comments were received on cultural resources. Commenters requested that resources be avoided, such as, century farms, places currently or nominated to be on the National Registry of Historic Places, historic farms, historic school houses, cemeteries, archeological sites, historic trails, and

homesteads. Other specific locations mentioned include Mount Trempealeau and Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic trails and homestead. Tribal representatives explicitly asked that specific areas of tribal importance be avoided including active tribal ceremonial sites, grave sites along the Mississippi River protected under Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGRPA), Native American cave and mound burial sites, vision quest sites, and architectural property, archeological sites, culturally sensitive sites, or traditional cultural properties significant to the Ho Chunk Nation. In addition, tribes requested to be included in the formal Section 106 process by being provided with cultural resource studies and archeological reports and offered to host site visits with the RUS.

#### ***3.4.12 Interconnection to Generation***

Twelve (12) comments were received regarding the project's interconnection to a generation source. Most of the comments were inquiries regarding the kind of generation that would be energizing the project if built. Some commenters advocated locally generated energy and wind generated energy on the transmission lines, while others expressed their opposition to the lines carrying energy from coal generation. Those commenting on coal generation also requested that adverse environmental impacts caused by coal generation be assessed in the EIS, including air pollution, emissions, and global warming.

#### ***3.4.13 Land Rights and Easement Acquisition***

Twenty-two (22) comments were received on land rights and easement acquisition. Most of the commenters questioned the process of easement acquisition, compensation for direct and indirect decreases in land and property value, allowable uses within an easement, eminent domain, maintenance, repairs, and easement valuation. Other commenters questioned the safe and allowable distance between a home and a transmission line, addressed avoiding properties that already have a utility easement, and questioned the fairness of placing the project on properties that do not directly benefit as a result of the project. Commenters also raised concerns about taking easements from landowners who own a small parcel of land. Commenters requested that all project activities remain within the ROW.

#### ***3.4.14 Land Use***

Eleven comments (11) were received regarding land use. Commenters requested that direct and indirect impacts to current and future land use be examined in the EIS, to include agriculture, forests, river valleys, Mn DNR forestry management areas, sensitive land uses, businesses, recreational land, residential areas, and commercial land use. Specific concerns included the encroachment on the Peerless Chain Company property.

#### ***3.4.15 Noise***

Five (5) comments were received regarding noise. The comments focused on the audible hum of transmission lines or the whistling that occurs in windy conditions. The commenters requested that noise impacts to quiet rural areas, noise, residential, recreational, and wildlife preservation areas where background noise is generally quiet and characterized by wind, insect, and bird noises be analyzed in the EIS.



### ***3.4.16 Process***

One hundred twenty-five (125) comments were received on the various regulatory and planning processes the project is subject to prior to construction. These comments included questions and requests about the adequacy and legality of the federal, state, local, routing and planning processes used in the project. Comments received regarding the EIS and federal permitting process asked for the EIS to analyze direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts across a variety of resources, including the Mississippi River crossing, National Scenic Byways, federally protected wildlife areas, and social and economic resources. A commenter also requested that the EIS independently verify the project's need articulated by the proponent and include information, illustrations, and modeling for the transmission line structures and substations, river crossings, system alternatives, noise impacts, EMF, and mitigation measures for all resources. An explanation was also requested regarding the purpose of the scoping process, and specifically why public comments were not gathered prior to public scoping on the AES and MCS documents. Commenters also requested that other federal, state, and local regulations are met and agencies be provided the opportunity to be involved in the process. Specific agencies mentioned include the FAA, USFWS, Mn DNR, WDNR, and other state and local agencies, as well as the Ho-Chunk Nation Tribe, the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and other tribes in Wisconsin. In addition, some commenters questioned the accuracy of the data used in the planning stages.

Many of the process comments were regarding the adequacy of the public meetings, and the information provided. Commenters made note of information provided by staff and raised the question of veracity of the information. Some commenters believed the proponent's discussion of project need was not sufficiently presented at the public scoping meetings. Additional comments regarding the need for the project are included in section 3.4.19 Purpose and Need.

### ***3.4.17 Project Alternatives***

Eighty-three (83) comments were received regarding project alternatives. Commenters provided suggestions for reasonable system alternatives to be included in the EIS: local generation and transmission, conservation, alternative sources of energy, renewable energy, nuclear energy, incentivized conservation, postponement, undergrounding, decentralized energy, load management, upgrading existing transmission lines, smart grid technology, and the no build alternative. Specific commenters requested that RUS choose alternatives that do not conflict with NPS and Wildlife Area policies.

### ***3.4.18 Public Facilities or Uses***

One (1) comment was received regarding public facilities or uses. Mn/DOT stated that safety rest areas cannot be encroached by utility lines or structures.

### ***3.4.19 Purpose and Need***

One hundred forty-three (143) comments were received regarding the project's purpose and need. Most of the comments questioned the legitimacy of the need provided by the utilities and requested that the EIS independently verify the need for the project and review the background data used to create the need justification including load forecasts, assumptions, data, and projections. The EIS should also explain the regulatory criteria for approval of load forecasts applicable to the Proposal and provide a thorough and

independent review of all forecast data and assumptions. The EIS should specifically analyze the degree to which the load forecast assumptions of the project proponents reflect load management and conservation. Some other commenters also suggested that the real need for the project is to create profit for the private power suppliers that have ownership in CapX2020. One specific comment questioned whether the project is appropriate for borrowing per the Rural Electrification Act, since according to the commenter, regional and urban centers created the need and will benefit from the project, not rural areas.

### ***3.4.20 Recreation***

Fourteen (14) comments were received on recreation resources. Most of the commenters requested that recreational areas be preserved and avoided. Specific areas and activities included the Woodland Camp, Camp Victory, the Zumbro River Valley, Lake Zumbro, useable lakes and rivers in southeastern Minnesota, Steeplechase Ski and Snowboard Area, the bluffs near the Mississippi River, hunting grounds on private and public property, fishing areas, hiking areas, campgrounds, trails, and parks.

### ***3.4.21 Residential***

Ten (10) comments were received regarding proximity to residences. Most of the commenters requested that residences, family farms, and future home sites be avoided. Other commenters asked that data gathered at public meetings be added to maps and current data be reviewed and updated regarding the location of homes in the project area.

### ***3.4.22 River Crossings***

Three (3) comments were received regarding the potential river crossings identified as part of the proposed project. Commenters request that the direct and indirect impacts of the Mississippi, Black, and Cannon River crossings; long-term maintenance; and cost of the crossings be analyzed in the EIS. One specific commenter asked that the transmission lines not create a barrier for migratory birds in the flyway. Another commenter stated that the Cannon River should be avoided because it is designated as part of the Minnesota Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Program, defined as rivers, along with their adjacent lands, that possess outstanding scenic, scientific, historic, and recreational resources. Commenters also requested that disturbed riparian areas be kept to a minimum for project construction.

### ***3.4.23 Route Alternatives***

One hundred seventy-seven (177) comments were received suggesting route alternatives. The comments varied from general routing suggestions to route specific comments. Some of the general comments included recommendations that existing corridors, ROWs, roads, rail lines, fence lines, property lines, non-farmable areas, established commercial and industrial corridors, and transmission lines should be paralleled and used when choosing the final route. Commenters also asked that existing residences and farms, private land, existing pipeline easements, rural river valleys, farmland, an agricultural protection district (A1) as specified in Goodhue County Zoning ordinance, existing contour terraces, bluff country, dairy farms, major roads, McCarthy Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), the Zumbro River Valley, the Mississippi River corridor, and Weaver Dunes be avoided when choosing the final route. One comment suggested that properties with existing transmission lines be avoided, in order to limit cumulative impacts of additional transmission lines. Other commenters suggested that the project

should be routed through wildlife areas, wetlands, woodlands, and public Mn DNR land to avoid impacts to populated areas and agricultural land. Some commenters emphasized that the shortest and least expensive route should be used, and that the displacement of people should be avoided. Commenters also recommended that the project should be routed where it is needed, near population centers of Rochester and La Crosse and Highway 52. A comment was submitted requesting that the EIS include analysis of various corridor alternatives to determine which corridor would minimize impacts. A common request was to underground the entire project.

The following is a bulleted list of route alternative comments. The comments presented here are the opinion of the commentator and not necessarily fact. The list is organized by geographical location of the proposed transmission line routes:

### Hampton to North Rochester Substation Siting Area

- Consider routing along Highway 52, it reduces impacts on rural landscape, agricultural communities, and native wildlife and plant communities.
- Combine existing line and new project to reduce impacts along Highway 52.
- A5 (Highway 52) is preferred over A6 and A122, because the other routes would cut cross-county and be harder to construct.
- Highway 52 is preferred because it would cause fewer impacts to residences, schools, cropland, and wildlife habitat.
- The Highway 52 alternative is better than the Highway 60 alternative, which is 17 miles longer, encumbers small farms, and razes sensitive forest and wetland areas.
- Avoid irrigation system on the Syngenta Farm near Route A120.
- Avoid Crossing the Cannon River in areas designated Wild, Scenic and Recreational by the state of Minnesota.
- Combine existing transmission lines and the new project route A70 into one corridor in Section 34 of Wanamingo Township.
- Avoid contour terraces built for agriculture in Warsaw Township.
- Avoid the homes near Highway 60.
- Highway 60 is the preferred route to get from Zumbrota to Kenyon.
- The route west of Highway 56 should be avoided because of potential impacts to shrike populations.
- Avoid the farm at 22075 Northfield Boulevard, located northeast of Hampton, Minnesota, because of the huge agricultural and financial impact the route would have on its owners.
- Avoid interruption to overlapping irrigation system on farm located on the northeast quarter of Section 4, and northwest quarter of Section 3 in Hampton Township.
- Avoid a property located directly west of the southern stoplight on Highway 52 in Cannon Falls that hosts an old growth Burr Oak forest that should be preserved.
- If route A4 is chosen, re-route the transmission so that it parallels field lines and property boundaries and does not cut across fields and interrupt pivot irrigation system.
- To avoid interruption to farming activities of landowner who owns multiple parcels, re-route the transmission line out of the field located near segment A-66, Section 31 of Wanamingo Township. The re-route should start one-half mile west of 70<sup>th</sup> Avenue, run north at 70<sup>th</sup> Avenue for one-quarter mile, and then run west along the property line.

- Near route segment A-67, along Highway 60, Xcel already owns structures and has an easement in the field. The segment should be re-routed to parallel the existing line. This re-route would allow access for construction and maintenance and enable the landowner to continue aerial application of fungicides.
- The route should avoid impacting future development in the city of Cannon Falls, which is planning a road improvement and light rail project.
- The route that follows 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue would impact less residential housing and farmland than the alternative.
- The City of Hampton prefers that the route is moved to the eastern city limits so the project does not affect future development.
- The proposed route crossing of the Cannon River, located in an undisturbed area, would cause substantial negative impacts. New alternatives should be developed for crossing the Cannon River that should be limited to existing disturbed corridors such as highways or existing transmission lines.
- Private land should be avoided, instead parallel Highway 35W near Northfield and Owatonna to Rochester and then parallel I-90 east.

### Zumbro River Crossing Area

- The 345 kV route in the highly densely populated areas near Oronoco should be re-routed to the sparsely populated areas to the north.
- Route B102 should be avoided because there is a major water runoff and deep ditches underneath the route.
- The southern option in this area is the best route because its flatter, has less homes, and less trees than the northern option.
- The route combination of B28, B91, B111, B93, B161, and B162 should be used.
- Segment B32 should be avoided because it's a fencerow, windbreak, a stand of 100 year old oak trees, and habitat for pheasants, deer, turkeys, birds, bees and butterflies.
- There are alternative routes for every other segment except the one that crosses about 2.5 miles of the farm at 46998 170<sup>th</sup> Avenue near Zumbrota, Minnesota.

### Mississippi River Crossing

- **Alma**
  - County Highway 12 and 247 are preferred over locations without existing linear features.
  - Avoid crossing the Mississippi River at segments listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory.
  - The project should be buried where the route crosses the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge to avoid negative impacts.
  - Segment B27 should be avoided because it's one-quarter mile from a home near Hammond, Minnesota.
  - The area north of the project area is better for transmission lines than the current corridors.
  - There are American bald eagle nests that should be avoided near the river bluffs, Camp Victory, and Woodland Camp on segment B18.
  - Route combinations B93, B159, and B162, or B93, B161, and B160 would cause less impact to homes, dairy farms, and agricultural use than the alternatives.

- Route combination B28, B111, B91, B93, B161, and B162, located in agricultural land, is preferred over the alternative B27, which is located through the Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood State Forest.
- B45 or B46 are preferred over B119, which is located through a residential yard.
- If the Alma option for the Mississippi River crossing is chosen, MNDNR recommends that the existing 69 kV transmission line be paralleled past the Woodbury Wildlife Management Area near Zumbrota, Goodhue County, Minnesota.
- **Winona**
  - Avoid the future RTP Company manufacturing sites that have been engineered and excavated. The future manufacturing sites are located near Winona, at 1416 and 1510 East Eighth Street and 1050 East Fourth Street.
  - Avoid impacts to the Mississippi River downstream of segments designated Wild and Scenic and listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory.
  - The project should be buried where the route crosses the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge to avoid negative impacts.
  - If the Winona location for the Mississippi River Crossing is chosen, reduce visual impacts by placing the route on the east side of the last bluff as it descends toward the river and crosses Highway 61.
  - The route along I-90 is preferred over the option along Highway 25.
- **La Crescent**
  - Choose the route along the Interstate 90 existing corridor. The La Crescent Mississippi River crossing location is preferred over the alternatives.
  - The current proposed route runs over a dairy farm at 4329 75<sup>th</sup> street northeast, near Rochester. The segment should be re-routed to follow the east property line.
  - Avoid impacts to the Mississippi River downstream of segments designated Wild and Scenic and listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory.
  - There may be a conflict with this project and the future east circle bypass road project around Rochester. It's planned to be located in the same location near County Road 11, south of Viola Road, and north of County Road 9.
  - Route segments B120 and B119, and B117 are preferred over the alternatives.
  - The project should be buried where the route crosses the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge to avoid negative impacts.
  - Segment B89 should be re-routed to avoid bisecting fields. The re-route should parallel County Road 11 south (near B160 on the map) or use segment B159.
  - The route located near 4313 Highway 247 northeast, in Elgin, should be re-routed so it parallels the property line that runs north and south and moved 1.5 miles to the east along Olmsted County Road 11. It should extend to the north and connect to one of the routes running east west.
  - Segments B112 and B89 would impact multiple dairy farms in Farmington Township, Minnesota. Segments B159 and B160 are preferred because they do not affect any dairy farms, the route is more direct, it affects less homes, and is routed through cropland.

- The project should be routed along existing Interstates 90 and 94.
- Segment B120 is routed behind a lot of properties, which is better than the alternatives that are in the front of many properties.
- Segment B47 would be easy to access by using County Road 11.
- Consider an alternative route through the Pfeiffer Valley, which could hide the lines below the skyline and reduce visual impact.
- The area to the south of I-90 should be avoided because it is rich in bluff land habitat for the timber rattlesnakes, which are protected under Minnesota endangered species law. If the project were routed here, it would increase fragmentation of habitat and result in negative edge effects.
- The La Crescent Mississippi River Crossing location would be more expensive, damaging, and difficult due to terrain than the other options. The La Crescent option would also destroy the view of the Mississippi River and the bluffs.

### Wisconsin Routes

- Avoid crossing the Black River in segments designated Wild and Scenic and that are also listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory.
- Consider routes on Highway 35 that avoid impacts to farmland.
- The existing lines to Arcadia should be paralleled.
- Do not use the Arcadia and Blair routes as there are many hills that present a challenge for construction. An alternative would be to route the project parallel to Interstate 90 from Rochester to La Crosse, or parallel existing lines from Alma and Trempealeau into La Crosse.
- The Q1 line in Wisconsin should be used as a route corridor, because there are fewer people than the other alternatives.
- The existing La Crosse Substation should be expanded for this project.
- Under segment C68, two existing structures should be replaced with one new double circuit pole in the field so the owner can use pivot irrigation instead of traveling guns, which use more electricity. The referenced property is located at N11794 Fremont Street in Trempealeau, Wisconsin.
- The Wisconsin Great River Road National Scenic Byway should be avoided by this project because of potential aesthetic impacts and encroachment on the various intrinsic byway features.
- WDNR requests that the La Crosse Marsh and Van Loon State Wildlife Area be avoided.

### 161 kV Transmission Line

- The Douglas Trail route is preferred over the alternatives because it takes advantage of the abandoned railroad corridor.
- The 161 kV route in the densely populated areas near Oronoco should be re-routed to the sparsely populated areas to the north.
- The western alternative is a better option because there is an existing ROW for People's Cooperative transmission lines, it is shorter and straighter and there are fewer homes.

### *3.4.24 Social and Economic*

Eighty-two (82) comments were received regarding social and economic resources. Most of the commenters requested that direct and indirect impacts to social and economic resources be analyzed in the EIS. Specific concerns and issues were regarding impacts to agriculture-based businesses,

recreation businesses, property and home values, re-sale value of property, taxes, land- and property-based income sources, visual resources that provide values to properties, tourism and the resources it is based on, electricity rates, businesses, and future development. Comments were also received questioning the continued viability of small farms that might be part of a final alignment and therefore host an easement. Many commenters addressed financial compensation for decreases in home, farm, and property values that are directly or indirectly impacted by the proposed project. Others questioned the source of project funds and wondered about other potential use for the money.

### ***3.4.25 Transportation and Access***

Two (2) comments were received on transportation and access. One requested that private airports be considered during the routing process. The other commenter requests that impacts to private drives be avoided.

### ***3.4.26 Visual***

Forty-four (44) comments were received regarding visual resources. Many commented that transmission lines are ugly, unsightly, and eyesores. Others requested that the EIS address direct and indirect visual impacts to specific resources ranging from the National Scenic Byway located in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the Mississippi River channel, Van Loon Wildlife Area, scenic byways, neighborhoods and homes, Lake Zumbro, rural agricultural communities, waterways, wetlands, and recreational areas. The EIS should analyze the degree to which the proposed project would impact features like these for tourism, recreation, and enjoyment across all the alternatives. Mn DNR submitted comments stating a permit would not be granted for any type of construction within a statutory boundary of a state park, and if the project is proposed proximate to a state park, the EIS should include a viewshed analysis of impacts to park visitors. Mn/DOT indicated that they will strictly enforce vegetation management requirements at safety rest areas for aesthetic reasons.

## 4.0 Project Schedule

RUS will prepare the Draft EIS and anticipates distribution in summer 2010. A public review, public meeting and comment period on the Draft EIS would occur in that same timeframe. Additionally, RUS will engage in necessary agency consultation and coordination regarding potential effects to resources will be conducted. RUS will continue to review and respond to substantive comments provided to them. A Final EIS will be prepared and distributed in late 2010 with an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the Final EIS. A Record of Decision is anticipated to be published in spring 2011.

### Federal Review Process

