

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Rural Development

#### **Dairyland Power Cooperative:** Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment

**AGENCY:** Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service, USDA

**ACTION:** Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given that the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, is issuing an environmental assessment (EA) in connection with possible impacts related to a project proposed by Dairyland Power Cooperative of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

The proposal is for construction of a one on one combined cycle generation plant with a capacity of approximately 625 megawatts with an in-service date in 2024 in the City of Superior, Wisconsin. The Project would be owned by Dairyland Power Cooperative and South Shore Energy, LLC, a subsidiary of ALLETE, Inc. The project would also include the construction of approximately 4 miles of 345-kV transmission line from the generation plant to a new switching station in Parkland, Wisconsin. The switching station would be built by American Transmission Company. The plant site would be approximately 26.3 acres in size. The transmission line would extend from the plant generally southeast along existing utility infrastructure and would require a 130-foot right of way. Dairyland Power Cooperative will be seeking financing from RUS for its portion of the project development.

Dairyland needs to add new generating capacity to the current resource mix to serve growing load within the service territories that the member cooperatives serve (including the newly acquired member cooperative load, in Minnesota and Illinois, from Interstate Power and Light) and to replace generation that was recently retired. The addition of the NTEC will also enable Dairyland to facilitate the addition of new renewable electricity sources to the power portfolio by complementing their intermittent nature.

Construction of the NTEC Project requires identification, consideration, and evaluation of sites for location of the generation facilities, as well as alignments for development of the necessary linear electricity transmission facilities. For the Project, two generation sites, Nemadji River and Hill Avenue, were identified, as were two alternative transmission line routes (eastern and western) for transmission line development. Each site was combined with each transmission line alternative as a unique Project alternative for comparison and evaluation. These alternatives are analyzed in the EA.

**DATES:** Written comments on this EA will be accepted until November 30, 2020. All comments should be emailed to [NTECEAcomments@gmail.com](mailto:NTECEAcomments@gmail.com) by November 30, 2020, in order to be considered.

**ADDRESSES:** A copy of the EA may be viewed online at the following websites: Rural Utilities Service at [www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments/project\\_name](http://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments/project_name), the Dairyland Power Cooperative website at <https://www.dairylandpower.com/NTEC/EA>, and the Project website at <http://nemadjienergycenter.com/resources>, as well as at the following libraries:

- Superior Public Library, 1530 Tower Avenue, Superior, WI 54880 (715-394-8860)

- Jim Dan Hill Library, University of Wisconsin – Superior, 907 N. 19th Street, Superior, WI 54880 (715-394-8343)
- La Crosse Public Library, 800 Main Street, La Crosse, WI 54601 (608-789-7100)
- Murphy Library Resource Center, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, 1631 Pine Street, La Crosse, WI 54601 (608-785-8505)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is advised that the public contact library staff prior to arrival to confirm hours, availability of the EA materials, and, if necessary, schedule an appointment for review.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

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**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Dairyland Power Cooperative proposes to participate with South Shore Energy, LLC (SSE), a subsidiary of ALLETE Inc., in a one on one combined cycle natural gas generation plant (NTEC facility) with an in-service date in 2024 (the Project). The NTEC facility is a cornerstone enabling Dairyland’s Sustainable Generation Plan which is weighted very heavily with renewable sources. This Project will be capable of operating in peaking and intermediate load modes to fulfill energy and capacity requirements for Dairyland.

The Project includes a combined cycle natural gas turbine (CCGT) electric generating unit consisting of one H-Class gas turbine generator with a fired output of approximately 625 MW, a 1x1 one heat recovery steam generator (HRSG) with duct firing, and one steam turbine generator (STG). NTEC will burn natural gas with the capability to be retrofitted to use fuel oil as a backup fuel. NTEC facility will be between approximately 26 acres and 75 acres, depending on the site selected for the Project, and would be located near Superior, Wisconsin. The Project will use dry cooling by finned heat exchangers. Development of the NTEC facility also requires the development of associated electricity infrastructure. The new facility would require a new electric transmission line to connect to a new switching station located southeast of the site. The switching station would then be connected to the electricity grid in order to deliver the power generated to the bulk power system. The switching station would be built by American Transmission Company.

RUS prepared an environmental assessment that describes the project, assesses the proposed project’s environmental impacts, and summarizes, as applicable, any mitigation measures used to minimize environmental effects. All equipment at the Nemadji River Site would be located outside the 100-year and 500-year floodplain. The proposed transmission line would cross floodplain associated with the Nemadji River, Bear Creek, and Bluff Creek. Two transmission line structures would need to be placed within the Nemadji River floodplain due to the floodplain width.

For the Nemadji River Site, approximately 3.47 acres of wetlands would be permanently impacted (1.32 acres of palustrine emergent [PEM] wetlands, 0.33 acre of palustrine forested [PFO] wetlands, and 1.82 acres of palustrine shrub/scrub [PSS] wetlands) from placement of facility components. One existing detention basin would be relocated and expanded. Additionally, the Nemadji River Site’s staging area would temporarily impact approximately 14.82 acres of wetlands (4.54 acres of PEM wetlands and 10.28 acres of PFO wetlands). As a result of the temporary staging area impacts, approximately 10.3 acres of PFO wetlands would be converted to PEM wetlands. For the proposed transmission line, approximately

0.017 acre of wetlands would be permanently impacted (0.007 acre of PEM wetlands, 0.006 acre of PEM/PSS wetlands, and 0.004 acre of PFO wetlands) from placement of structures in wetlands. Similarly, approximately 7.47 acres of wetlands would be temporarily impacted (4.36 acres of PEM wetlands, 2.43 acres of PEM/PSS wetlands, 0.66 acre of PFO wetlands, and 0.02 acre of PSS wetlands) from temporary wetland matting. As a result of clearing activities, approximately 5.61 acres of PFO wetlands and approximately 5.35 acres of PSS wetlands would be converted to PEM wetlands. Additionally, the transmission line's laydown area would temporarily impact 0.99 acre of wetlands (0.44 acre of PEM wetlands and 0.55 acre of PFO wetlands). As a result of the temporary laydown area impacts, approximately 0.55 acre of PFO wetlands would be converted to PEM wetlands. A total of 13 transmission line poles would likely be placed in wetlands. Switching station sites that minimized wetland impacts were considered as part of Project development. Although both selected switching station sites are entirely within wetland areas, these sites would minimize the potential wetland impacts associated with the switching stations. Locating the switching stations adjacent to the transmission line corridors minimizes additional wetland impacts that could have occurred in association with additional transmission line construction, construction access and road/driveway construction. The parcel identified for the Parkland Switchyard contains approximately 13.33 acres of wetlands (9.51 acres of PFO wetlands and 3.82 acres of PSS wetlands). For the Superior Switchyard, the parcel contains approximately 13.96 acres of wetlands (6.26 acres of PFO wetlands and 7.70 acres of PSS wetlands). Actual wetland impacts from switching station construction will depend on final design and location of the switching stations on the parcel. Mitigation measures to address floodplain and wetland impacts are discussed in detail in the EA. RUS has conducted an independent evaluation of the environmental assessment and believes that it accurately assesses the impacts of the proposed project. No significant impacts are expected as a result of the construction of the project.

Questions and comments should be sent to RUS at [NTECEAcomments@gmail.com](mailto:NTECEAcomments@gmail.com). RUS will accept questions and comments on the environmental assessment for 30 days from the date of initial publication of this notice.

Any final action by RUS related to the proposed project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal environmental laws and regulations and completion of environmental review procedures as prescribed by 7 CFR Part 1970, Environmental Policies and Procedures.

**Dated:** October 30, 2020