

## Appendix A

### Environmental Assessment Scoping Decision

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**In the Matter of Great River Energy's Application  
for a Route Permit for a 115 kV Laketown  
Transmission Line and Associated Facilities  
Project in Carver County, Minnesota**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
SCOPING DECISION**

**DOCKET NO. ET2/TL-24-132**

The above matter has come before the Commissioner of the Department of Commerce (Department) for a decision on the scope of the environmental assessment (EA) to be prepared for Great River Energy's proposed 115 kilovolt (kV) high voltage transmission line (HVTL) in Laketown and Dahlgren Townships, Carver County, Minnesota.

## **Project Description**

On August 19, 2024, Great River Energy (GRE) and Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative (MVEC) (applicants), filed a route permit application for the Laketown 115 kilovolt (kV) transmission line project (project) with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission).<sup>1</sup> The project consists of approximately 4.3 miles of a new 115 kV double-circuit HVTL. The new HVTL would connect an existing GRE 115 kV transmission line to a new substation located in Laketown Township, Carver County, Minnesota. The new Laketown Substation will be built as part of the project and owned by MVEC. The Project is located in the townships of Laketown and Dahlgren, Carver County, Minnesota.

## **Project Purpose**

The applicants indicate that the proposed project will provide electric service to end users within Carver, Sibley, Scott, Rice and LeSueur counties.<sup>2</sup> The applicants note that the project will provide reliable electric service to current and future end-use customers in this rapidly growing region and will ensure sufficient electrical capability for increased electric demand in the future.<sup>4</sup>

## **Regulatory Background**

In Minnesota, no person may construct a high voltage transmission line without a route permit from the Commission.<sup>3</sup> A high voltage transmission line is defined as a conductor of electric energy designed for and capable of operation at a voltage of 100 kV or more and greater than 1,500 feet in length.<sup>4</sup> The proposed project will consist of approximately 4.3 miles of double-circuit 115 kV transmission line and therefore requires a route permit from the Commission. Because the applicants' proposed transmission line is under 200 kV, the project is eligible to use the alternative review process prescribed by Minnesota

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<sup>1</sup> Route Permit Application for the Laketown 115 kV Transmission Line Project, Great River Energy, August 19, 2024, eDockets Numbers – Filing Letter [20248-209604-01](#); Application [20248-209604-02](#); Figures [20248-209604-03](#), [20248-209604-04](#), [20248-209604-05](#); Appendix A [20248-209604-06](#), [20248-209604-07](#); Appendix B [20248-209604-08](#), [20248-209604-09](#); Appendix C [20248-209604-10](#); Appendix D [20248-209605-01](#); Appendix E [20248-209605-02](#), [20248-209605-03](#); Appendix F [20248-209606-01](#); Appendix G [20248-209606-02](#); Appendix H [20248-209606-03](#) [hereinafter Application].

<sup>2</sup> Application, Section 1.5.

<sup>3</sup> Minnesota Statute 216E.03.

<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Statute 216E.01.

Statute 216E.04.<sup>5</sup> The applicants indicated their intent to use the alternative review process by notice to the Commission on July 10, 2024.<sup>6</sup>

The proposed project will operate at a voltage greater than 100 kV but will have a length in Minnesota less than ten miles; accordingly, the project is not considered a large energy facility and does not require a certificate of need from the Commission.<sup>7</sup>

## Scoping Process

Scoping is the first step in the environmental review process. The scoping process has two primary purposes: (1) to gather public input as to the impacts and mitigation measures to study in the EA and (2) to focus the EA on those impacts and mitigation measures that will aid in the Commission's decision on the site permit application.

Staff use the information gathered during scoping to inform the content of the EA. EERA staff gathered input on the scope of the EA through public meetings and an associated comment period. This scoping decision identifies the impacts and mitigation measures that will be analyzed in the EA.

## Public Information and Scoping Meetings

Commission and EERA staff held two public information and EA scoping meetings. One of the meetings was virtual, and one meeting was held in person. The virtual meeting was held on October 23, 2024, and had three attendees. The in-person meeting was held on October 28, 2024, and had eight attendees. Comments were received from four persons at the in-person meeting, who expressed concern on a variety of potential impacts associated with the project, including impacts to property value and land use, changes in the local aesthetic, and loss of habitat and wildlife.<sup>8</sup>

## Written Public Comments

A comment period, which closed on November 12, 2024, provided the public an opportunity to submit comments to EERA staff on potential impacts and mitigation measures for consideration during the EA scope development process. Comments were received from one state agency,<sup>9</sup> one Tribal government, two local governments, and four citizens.<sup>10</sup> Three of these comments proposed specific routing alternatives for consideration in the EA.

After close of the comment period, EERA staff conferred with the applicant on proposed routing alternatives for study in the EA. On December 4, 2024, the applicant filed responses to public comments received during the scoping process.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Minnesota Statute 216E.04, Subd. 2 (noting those projects that are eligible to proceed under an alternative permitting process).

<sup>6</sup> Notice of Intent to File a Route Permit Application for the Laketown Project Pursuant to the Alternative Permitting Process, July 10, 2024, eDockets Number [20247-208477-01](#).

<sup>7</sup> Minnesota Statute 216B.2421; Minnesota Statute 216B.243.

<sup>8</sup> Oral Comments on the Scope of Environmental Assessment, eDocket number [202411-212355-01](#).

<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, eDocket numbers [202411-211858-01](#) and [202411-211858-02](#).

<sup>10</sup> Written Comments on the Scope of Environmental Assessment, eDocket number [202411-212355-02](#).

<sup>11</sup> Applicants' Response Comments on EA Scope, eDocket number [202412-212706-01](#).

On December 12, 2024, EERA staff filed a scoping summary and recommendations regarding routing alternatives to study in the EA with the Commission.<sup>12</sup> On February 4, 2025, the Commission agreed with and adopted the recommendations made by EERA.<sup>13</sup>

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**HAVING REVIEWED THE MATTER**, consulted with EERA staff, and in accordance with Minnesota Rule 7850.3700, I hereby make the following scoping decision:

## **MATTERS TO BE ADDRESSED**

The EA will describe the project and the human and environmental resources of the project area. It will provide information on the potential impacts of the project as they relate to the topics outlined in this scoping decision and possible mitigation measures. It will identify impacts that cannot be avoided and irretrievable commitments of resources, as well as permits from other government entities that may be required for the project. The EA will discuss the relative merits of routing alternatives with respect to the routing factors in Minnesota Rule 7850.4100.

The issues outlined below will be analyzed in the EA for the project. This outline is not intended to serve as a table of contents for the document itself.

### **I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT**

- A. Project Description
- B. Project Purpose
- C. Route Description
- D. Project Costs

### **II. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

- A. High Voltage Transmission Line Route Permit
- B. Environmental Review Process
- C. Other Permits and Approvals

### **III. ENGINEERING, DESIGN, AND CONSTRUCTION**

- A. Transmission Line Structures
- B. Transmission Line Conductors
  - 1. Safety features in case of downed lines
- C. Associated Facilities

### **IV. Construction**

- A. Right-of-Way Acquisition
- B. Construction
- C. Restoration
- D. Damage Compensation
- E. Operation and Maintenance

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<sup>12</sup> EERA Scoping Summary and Recommendations, eDocket number [202412-212935-01](#).

<sup>13</sup> Commission Order, eDockets number [20252-214891-01](#).

**V. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIVE MEASURES**

The EA will include a discussion of the human and environmental resources potentially impacted by the project. Potential impacts of the project will be described and characterized. Based on the impacts identified, the EA will describe mitigation measures that could reasonably be implemented to reduce or eliminate the identified impacts. The EA will describe any unavoidable impacts resulting from implementation of the project.

Data and analyses will be commensurate with the level of impact for a given resource and the relevance of the information to consider mitigation measures. EERA staff will consider the relationship between the cost of data and analyses and the relevance and importance of the information in determining the level of detail of information to be prepared for the EA. Less important material may be summarized, consolidated, or simply referenced.

If relevant information cannot be obtained within timelines prescribed by statute and rule, the costs of obtaining such information is excessive, or the means to obtain it is unknown, EERA staff will include in the EA a statement that such information is incomplete or unavailable and the relevance of the information in evaluating potential impacts or alternatives.

- A. Environmental Setting
- B. Human Settlements
  - 1. Noise
  - 2. Aesthetics
  - 3. Displacement
  - 4. Property Values
  - 5. Zoning and Land Use Compatibility
  - 6. Cultural Values
  - 7. Transportation and Public Services
- C. Socioeconomics
  - 1. Environmental Justice
  - 2. Local Economies
- D. Public Health and Safety
  - 1. Electric and Magnetic Fields
  - 2. Emergency Services
- E. Land Based Economies
  - 1. Agriculture
  - 2. Forestry
  - 3. Mining
  - 4. Recreation and Tourism
- F. Archaeological and Historic Resources
- G. Natural Environment
  - 1. Water Resources
  - 2. Soils
  - 3. Geology
  - 4. Flora
  - 5. Fauna
  - 6. Air Quality

- 7. Climate Change / Climate Resiliency
- H. Threatened / Endangered / Rare and Unique Natural Resources
- I. Electric System Reliability
- J. Adverse Impacts that Cannot be Avoided
- K. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

**VI. ROUTES AND ALIGNMENTS TO BE EVALUATED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

The EA will evaluate the route proposed by the applicants' in their route permit application. In addition, the EA will evaluate (see attached map):

- A. Route Alternative A
- B. Route Alternative B
- C. Route Alternative C
- D. Alignment Alternative D

## **ISSUES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE EA**

The EA will not address following topics:

- Any route, route segment, or alignment alternative not specifically identified for study in this scoping decision.
- The manner in which landowners are paid for transmission line right-of-way easements.

## **SCHEDULE**

The EA is anticipated to be completed and available in April 2025. Public hearings will be held in the project area after issuance of the EA. Comments on the EA may be submitted into the hearing record.

Signed this 5th day of February, 2025

STATE OF MINNESOTA  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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Pete Wyckoff, Deputy Commissioner

## Laketown 115 kV Transmission Line Project – Routing Alternatives

Attachment 1. Routing Alternatives Map

