

MPUC Docket Number ET-6/TL-16-327

OAH Docket Number 80-2500-34009

Dear Honorable LauraSue Schlatter,

My Daughter and son-in-law bought hunting land that is crossed by the Minnesota Pipeline Company's easement in the fall of 2016. We are a large family of outdoorsmen and look forward to many trips to the land to experience the great outdoors and create a country getaway to relax and enjoy. My daughter was notified of the MPL-Laporte 115 kV HVTL Project Application for Route Permit and shared her concerns about the potential of a new HVTL easement on her property. As a retired engineer that worked 27 years for a utility in the northeast, she was hoping that I would provide comments on this proceeding.

MN Statute 216E.03 requires that consideration should be given to locate new HVTLs in existing HVTL routes and paralleling road rights of ways. Minnkota has worked with the MNDNR and the MNDOT to accommodate this requirement in its proposed route as submitted in the Application for a Route Permit MPL-Laporte 115kV HVTL Project (Application). This route will maximize the existing roadways to minimize the impact on the environment and surrounding communities during construction of this line and future operation, maintenance, and repair.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce Environmental Assessment provides information that supports approval of the submitted proposed route.

- Diagram 6 Transmission and Road ROW Schematic, page 25: depicts the potential for reduced tree removal in the ROW along the roadway. The HVTL required 100 feet of line clearance would only require 50 feet of additional tree trim and easements by utilizing the existing road right of way.
- Section 5.1.4 Construction Procedures Page 18: "Typical construction equipment that may be used for the Proposed Project includes tree removal equipment, line construction equipment, stringing equipment, and general construction equipment on rubber tires or tracks, as appropriate." "Minnkota will access the ROW from existing roads or trails that run parallel or perpendicular to the ROW. In some situations, private field roads or trails may be used. Where necessary to accommodate the heavy equipment used in construction, including cranes, cement trucks, and hole-drilling equipment, existing access roads may be upgraded. To the extent possible, Minnkota will coordinate these activities with the affected property owner(s) and/or state and local highway departments as appropriate."
  - By utilizing the existing roadways for construction, impact to the localized area will be reduced.
- Section 3.7 Operation and Maintenance Page 27:" If post-construction monitoring of the ROW reveals a higher density of noxious weeds on the ROW as compared to adjacent off ROW areas, Minnkota will obtain landowner permission and work to mitigate noxious weed concerns.<sup>67</sup>

Minnkota may use both herbicides and mechanical methods to control the spread of noxious weeds.”

- Rights of way along roadways are already monitored and weeds are mitigated. This would be a continuation of this practice over the roadway and HVTL ROW. This should minimize the need for both herbicides and mechanical methods of weed control over the 40 year life of the proposed line.
- Section 5.9.2 Geology and Topography Page 82: “The topography along the project area is relatively level. The geology underlying the project area is Middle Precambrian bedrock that is covered by glacial drift varying in depth from 100 to 500 feet.157” Section 5.1.4 Construction Procedures page 18(Application): “HVTL structures are generally designed for installation at existing grades. However, some sloped work areas may need to be graded or filled in order to establish a more level work surface for structure installation. If the landowner permits, it is preferred to leave the leveled areas and working pads in place for use in future maintenance activities, if any. If permission is not obtained, the site is graded back to its original condition to the extent feasible and imported fill is removed.”
  - This practice used along the roadway given it is relatively level will not create terracing issues along the roadway leading to water runoff and possible erosion during heavy rains and snow melt. The topography and soil conditions of the routes that parallel the pipeline and the Thompson Route were not covered in the Environmental Assessment and further study would be required to determine any terracing issues. As stated above, the Proposed Route follows a known level topology and should not have any issues.
- Section 5.9.9 Wildlife Page 96: “Since the majority of the anticipated alignments for each of the routing options are located adjacent to existing infrastructure (roadways, pipelines, and electrical distribution lines) fauna present within the potential ROWs are likely adapted to anthropogenic disturbance.”
  - The inclusion of the pipeline in this statement does not take into account that the routing of the HVTL in the pipeline ROW would require the creation of a greenfield HVTL ROW. This ROW would be 100 feet wide adjacent to the existing pipeline ROW with a separation of 100 feet. The MNDNR commented in a letter dated September 13, 2016 “Other proposed routes suggested by Minnkota Power would have cut through the middle of a Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) site of High Biodiversity, or crossed through Itasca State Park, the premier park of the Minnesota State Park system. MBS sites classified as “high” means the site contains very good quality occurrences of the rarest species, high-quality rare native plant communities, and/or important functional landscapes. The potential previous route areas included several rare features such as nests of red-shouldered hawks which are a species of special concern, rare feature of a quaternary Tunnel Valley formation, and an S2 ranked (meaning imperiled native plant community type) Red Pine- White Pine Forest. Previous routes would also have crossed a high value designated public waterways trout stream in an area that would not be able to be spanned by the placement of the poles. The current proposed route minimizes disturbance to the MBS site, follows road right of way or current power lines, crosses the trout stream where it can be spanned with no structures in the water, and

avoids Itasca State Park property.” This crossing is located at 400<sup>th</sup> St and crosses perpendicular to the creek along the route of the roadway and existing electric distribution line. Section 5.9.9 Wildlife Page 97: “Habitat fragmentation reduces the size of contiguous blocks of vegetation, such as forest; this reduces the total area of contiguous habitat available to wildlife species and increases the isolation of the habitat. Opportunistic and adaptable animals often succeed in highly fragmented habitats. Non-native invasive or pioneering plant species may encroach where disturbance provides a competitive advantage and an avenue of introduction, such as where habitat fragments occur. The alteration of plant community composition and structure can adversely affect those species that rely on the presence of certain plant species or vegetative cover. Fragmentation effects are greatest where large contiguous blocks are broken up into smaller patches that reduces interior forest habitat necessary for some species such as song birds. The effects would generally be greatest where new corridor is created, rather than where the transmission line parallels existing infrastructure ROWs (roadways, pipelines, and electrical distribution lines).” Section 6.5.4 Fauna Page 44(Application): The forested areas in the immediate vicinity of the Proposed Project provide habitat for a variety of fauna that are commonly found in wooded areas. These species may include deer, small mammals, waterfowl, raptors, perching birds, and amphibians. Because much of the Proposed Route is located adjacent to existing roads, fauna present in the vicinity of the Proposed Route are likely adapted to anthropogenic disturbance. Therefore it is not likely that the construction, operation, or maintenance of the Proposed Project will have any notable effect on fauna present in the area.

In conclusion I agree with Minnkota as outlined in an email dated 12/31/2015 from Terry Johnson (Minnkota) to Theresa Olson (DNR): “The proposed line routing greatly minimizes potential impacts, including minimizing fragmentation of habitats for various species, minimizing creation of new corridors, minimizing cross country access, minimizing timber removal overall and within proposed MCBS areas, maximizing distance of route along established roadways and within existing overhead power line ROWs, and spanning wetlands and one stream crossing. Minnkota considers this proposed route to be the best case scenario among the potential routes we’ve considered.” All new water crossings, Greenfield ROW, and major environmental impacts such as outlined in the MPL Collocate, Thompson, and all Seeger routes should be avoided as they do not minimize the potential impacts. Please approve this new HVTL along the Proposed Route as it has the least impact to the environment and best complies with MN Statute.

Regards,

Barbara Wacker