

Summary of Comments
November 6, 2002 Public Scoping Meeting
Proposed River Crossing/Right-of-Way Request
Arrowhead to Weston Project

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to reach a decision about a right-of-way (ROW) request for the Arrowhead to Weston Electric Transmission Line Project (Project). The State-approved route for the Project would cross the Namekagon River, which is part of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (Riverway). The applicants (i.e., Minnesota Power and Wisconsin Public Service Corporation) must obtain a ROW permit from the NPS prior to the initiation of construction within the Riverway boundary. The EIS must consider a wide range of topics including the potential impact of the proposed crossing on wetlands, floodplains, endangered or threatened plants and animals, cultural resources, public health and safety, and Indian Trust resources.

Scoping is a process used by Federal agencies to further define the important environmental issues to focus on in an EIS. Public scoping for this EIS began on September 23 with publication of a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in the *Federal Register*. Scoping letters and press releases were sent out to further solicit public input in October. On November 6, the NPS held a public scoping meeting in Hayward, Wisconsin. The public presented a number of issues at that meeting and requested that the comments we received at the meeting be posted to our website.

In response, a summary of the environmental issues identified *verbally* by the public at the November 6 meeting is provided below. The issues have been grouped according to category. Written comments received during the scoping period are still being summarized. Environmental issues identified at the public scoping meeting, those identified in written comments, and those we are required to consider by law, will be addressed the draft EIS. We expect to publish the draft EIS in Spring of 2003. The draft EIS will then be available for a 60-day public review and comment period.

Issues Concerning the Appropriate Scope of the EIS:

- The NPS should look at the cumulative effects of the entire 220-mile route.
- The NPS should look at impacts of the proposed project within the "whole" watershed (headwaters) of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, not just the river crossing.
- The NPS should include direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts all the way to the power source in Canada.

Issues Concerning the Alternatives:

- What is the project proponents' commitment to construction monitoring, reclamation, and reclamation monitoring?

- How will the power companies conduct or implement maintenance and repair projects along the whole transmission line? There are several stream crossings under NPS stewardship that are inaccessible now. Are the power companies going to build roads to the poles, or will they drive right through streams?
- How will the existing poles/structures be supported, while they construct the new poles?
- How or will the power companies obtain temporary construction easements?
- Are the soils in the project area or at the poles structurally able to support these large poles, even in the wetlands?
- Describe the proposed construction methods in detail including the ROW necessary during construction and after construction for the line and maintenance of the line.
- Describe in detail the underground methods, including the fluid-filled conduit.
- Who will insure that the conditions of the permit (if issued) would be followed?
- How would the applicants access the area during construction? It is very wet.
- How would repairs to the transmission line be conducted during wet periods?
- The existing 161-kV transmission line should be buried under the Riverway. NPS should improve rather than degrade the scenic value of the area.
- Preference expressed for No Action Alternative: deny the permit.
- Preference expressed for No Action Alternative: deny the permit. As a second choice approve a ROW request only for the 345- and 161-kV underground alternative.

Issues Concerning Water Quality:

- What are the issues (e.g., physical, structural, etc.) from or to the crude oil pipeline if a 345-kV line were to be constructed near it? How would the magnetic field influence the pipeline? Would the 345-kV line accelerate corrosion of the pipeline? Would adjacent wetlands influence the rate of corrosion? What is the potential for oil leaks and the risk to water quality?
- How would the tower footings effect the pipeline?
- Would chemicals be used to control vegetation/weeds along or underneath the transmission lines? What would be the impact to water quality?

- If low voltage current can break up PAH's and PCB's in 90 days, what affect will the 345-kV transmission line have on PAH's and PCB's (see USACE, EPA Duluth sediment research)?

Issues Concerning Vegetation and Wetlands:

- How would vegetation be impacted during and after construction?
- Application of herbicides within the construction ROW is not needed; herbicide application would kill vegetation and may affect water quality.
- How would wetlands be protected during construction-related activities such as establishment of footings and placement of tower structures? How deep will the tower bases be underground? Would placement of towers affect the hydrology of the adjacent wetlands?
- How would water quality be impacted during and after construction?

Issues Concerning Fish and Wildlife:

- What would be the potential effects (e.g., reproductive rates, chemical properties) to the aquatic and terrestrial components of the ecosystem (e.g., macroinvertebrates, fish, soils, vegetation, wildlife) as a result of long-term exposure to electric and magnetic fields associated with the proposed transmission line?
- What would be the potential effects to migrating fish, specifically lake sturgeon, walleye, and redhorse in the Namekagon River as a result of long-term exposure to electric and magnetic fields associated with the proposed transmission line?
- Would electric and magnetic fields be a barrier to migrating fish?
- There would be increased potential for avian collisions with additional wires crossing the Riverway if the overhead 345-kV alternative is approved and constructed.

Issues Concerning Threatened and Endangered Species:

- According to the commentor, there was no assessment conducted of the impact to endangered species for the whole corridor during the State's EIS process and this should be completed.

Issues Concerning Land Use and Social-Economic Factors:

- Granting the ROW permit may be inconsistent with the Riverway's scenic easement program.
- How would the proposed action affect the Washburn County Soil & Water Conservation Plan?

Issues Concerning Health Effects and Electromagnetic Fields

- What are the potential effects to human health as a result of exposure to the electric and magnetic fields associated with the proposed transmission line, particularly to the public that uses the Riverway for canoeing, fishing, and hiking?
- Kirchof's Law should be considered in the EIS.
- Commentor recommended using a study published by the California Health Department (560 pages) on childhood leukemia links to transmission lines in preparing the EIS.

Issues Concerning Noise:

- The noise factor needs to be considered in the EIS. What would be the noise levels produced by the transmission line under different atmospheric and load conditions? What about noise from the transition stations?

Issues Concerning Visual Impacts:

- What is the potential for transmission lines to glow at night?
- The NPS should deny the ROW request if any of the proposed structures could be observed from any of the key observation points.
- The osprey nest located on one of the existing transmission line towers is a visual amenity at the river crossing.

Issues Concerning Wild and Scenic Rivers Policy:

- How much protection do the State and Federal statutes provide to the resources of the project area?
- What effect would this transmission line have on future generations?
- We should be protecting and enhancing the Riverway, not creating more damage.
- The proposed transmission line would be inconsistent with the values for which the Riverway was established.

Issues Concerning Rivers Listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory:

- The NPS EIS should discuss the impact of the proposed transmission line to rivers listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI). There is an Executive Order that protects these rivers and the NPS has stewardship responsibility for them. How would NPS permitting affect these NRI rivers (e.g., Totagatic River, upper St. Croix River, etc)?

Miscellaneous:

- Please review all the documented issues and impacts within the Wisconsin draft EIS. What happened and why did this go through at all, with all the identified issues?