



85 7th Place East, Suite 500, St. Paul, MN 55101-2198  
main: 651.296.4026 tty: 651.296.2860 fax: 651.297.7891  
[www.commerce.state.mn.us](http://www.commerce.state.mn.us)

## NOTICE OF COMMISSION MEETING

**Issued:** Wednesday, January 21, 2009

**In the Matter of the Route Permit Application for a 345 kV Transmission Line from  
Brookings County, South Dakota to Hampton, Minnesota**

**PUC Docket Number:** ET2/TL-08-1474

**PLEASE TAKE NOTICE** that the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (the Commission) will consider the completeness of the above referenced route permit application. If accepted, the Commission will also consider appointing a public advisor and an advisory task force for the above referenced project at its regularly scheduled meeting on **Tuesday, January 27, 2009 at 1:00 P.M.** The meeting will be held in the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission's large hearing room, Suite 350, 121 7th Place East, St. Paul, MN 55101.

**PLEASE ALSO TAKE NOTICE** that the Minnesota Office of Energy Security Energy Facility Permitting staff's Comments and Recommendations to the Commission for the proposed project are available for review. These documents and other relevant information are accessible at:

<http://energyfacilities.puc.state.mn.us/Docket.html?Id=19860>

and

<https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/search.jsp>

(input docket "08" and number "1474")

Paper copies of the materials may be requested by contacting:

Scott Ek, Project Manager  
Office of Energy Security  
Energy Facility Permitting  
85 7<sup>th</sup> Place East, Suite 500  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-2198  
Email: [scott.ek@state.mn.us](mailto:scott.ek@state.mn.us)  
Phone: 651-296-8813



**BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

**COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE  
MINNESOTA OFFICE OF ENERGY SECURITY  
ENERGY FACILITY PERMITTING STAFF**

**DOCKET NO. ET2/TL-08-1474**

Meeting Date: January 27, 2009 ..... Agenda Item # 5

Company: Great River Energy and Xcel Energy

Docket No: **ET2/TL-08-1474**

**In the Matter of the Route Permit Application for a 345 kV Transmission  
Line from Brookings County, South Dakota to Hampton, Minnesota.**

Issue(s): Should the Commission accept the application as complete? If accepted, should the Commission authorize the Office of Energy Security to appoint a public advisor and an advisory task force?

OES Staff: Scott E. Ek ..... 651-296-8813

**RELEVANT DOCUMENTS**

Route Permit Application ..... December 29, 2008

The enclosed materials are work papers of the Office of Energy Security (OES) Energy Facility Permitting (EFP) staff. They are intended for use by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC or Commission) and are based on information already in the record unless otherwise noted.

This document can be made available in alternative formats (i.e. large print or audio tape) by calling 651-201-2202. Citizens with hearing or speech disabilities may call us through Minnesota Relay at 1-800-627-3529 or by dialing 711.

## **DOCUMENTS ATTACHED**

1. Figures 1 to 6 – Proposed Route Overview Maps
2. Draft Public Participation Plan

*Note:* Relevant documents and additional information can be found on eDockets (08-1474) or the PUC's Energy Facilities Siting and Routing website at:  
<http://energyfacilities.puc.state.mn.us/Docket.html?Id=19860>.

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## **STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES**

Should the Commission accept the route permit application as complete? If accepted, should the Commission authorize the OES to appoint a public advisor and an advisory task force? Should the Commission refer the docket to the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) for conduct of the contested case hearing?

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

On December 29, 2008, Great River Energy and Xcel Energy filed a route permit application under the full permitting process for 237 miles of 345 kV transmission line and associated facilities between the existing Brookings County substation near White, South Dakota, and a newly proposed substation near Hampton, Minnesota.

Because the proposed transmission line capacity is greater than 200 kV, a certificate of need (CN) application is required. A CN application (ET2-E002/CN-06-1115) for this project was filed by Great River Energy and Xcel Energy on November 2, 2005.

### ***Project Description***

The proposed project begins at the state's western border near Hendricks, Minnesota and would cross a portion of the following counties: Lincoln, Lyon, Yellow Medicine, Chippewa, Redwood, Brown, Renville, Sibley, Le Sueur, Scott, and Dakota (see Figures 1 through 6).

The proposed route includes six route segments totaling 237 miles and would be constructed between (1) the Brookings County substation near White, South Dakota, and a new Hampton substation near Hampton, Minnesota and (2) the Lyon County substation near Marshall, Minnesota, and the Minnesota Valley substation near Granite Falls, Minnesota. The proposal includes the construction of four new substations and the expansion of four existing substations. New substations include the Hazel Creek substation near Granite Falls, Minnesota; the Helena substation near New Prague, Minnesota; the Cedar Mountain substation near Franklin, Minnesota; and the Hampton substation near Hampton, Minnesota.

The applicants are requesting a 1,000 foot wide route width for the majority of the project. In areas of proposed substations and five other locations along the route, the applicants request a 1.25 mile wide route width to facilitate system interconnection and address river crossing areas and environmental and land use concerns.

The applicants propose using single structure steel poles which would require a 150 foot right-of-way for the majority of the route. A 100 foot right-of-way would be required for the route segment connecting to the Cedar Mountain substation near Franklin, Minnesota. There may be some limited situations along the route where specialty structures (H-frames or triple circuit structures) may be required. A right-of-way up to 180 feet in width would be required in these instances.

## **REGULATORY PROCESS AND PROCEDURES**

No person may construct a high-voltage transmission line without a route permit from the Commission (Minn. Stat. 216E.03, subd. 2). 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 is greater than 1,500 feet in length (Minn. Stat. 216E.01, subd. 4).

Route permit applications must provide specific information about the proposed project including, but not limited to, applicant information, route description, environmental impacts, alternatives, and mitigation measures (Minn. R. 7849.5220). The Commission may accept an application as complete, reject an application and require additional information to be submitted, or accept an application as complete upon filing of supplemental information (Minn. R. 7849.5230).

The review process begins with the determination by the Commission that the application is complete. The Commission has one year to reach a final decision on the route permit application from the date the application is determined to be complete. The Commission may extend this limit for up to three months for just cause or upon agreement of the applicant (Minn. R. 7849.5340).

### ***Public Advisor***

Upon acceptance of an application for a site or route permit, the Commission must designate a staff person to act as the public advisor on the project (Minn. R. 7849.5250). The public advisor is someone who is available to answer questions from the public about the permitting process. In this role, the public advisor may not act as an advocate on behalf of any person. The Commission can authorize the OES to name a member from the EFP staff as the public advisor or assign a Commission staff member.

### ***Advisory Task Force***

The Commission has the authority to appoint an advisory task force (Minn. Stat. 216E.08). An advisory task force comprises representatives of local governmental units and potentially, other interested local persons. A task force can be charged with identifying additional routes or specific impacts to be evaluated in the environmental impact statement (EIS) and terminates upon completion of its charge, designation of alternative routes to be included in the EIS, or the date specified by the Commission, whichever occurs first.

The Commission is not required to assign a task force for every project. However, if the Commission does not name a task force, Minn. R. 7849.5270 allows a citizen to request appointment of a task force. The Commission would then need to determine at its next meeting if a task force should be appointed or not. The decision whether to appoint a task force does not need to be made at the time of accepting the application; however, it should be made as soon as practicable to ensure its charge can be completed prior to an EIS scoping decision.

### ***Environmental Review***

Applications for high voltage transmission line route permits are subject to environmental review, which is conducted by EFP staff under Minn. R. 7849.5200. The staff will provide notice and conduct public information and scoping meetings to solicit public comments on the scope of the EIS. The Director of the OES will determine the scope of the EIS. The draft EIS will be completed and made available prior to the public hearing.

### ***Public Hearing***

Applications for high voltage transmission line route permits under the full permitting process require a public contested-case hearing upon completion of the draft EIS pursuant to Minn. R. 7849.5330. A portion of the hearing will be held in the counties where the proposed project would be located.

The docket (Docket ET2/TL-08-1474) must be referred to the OAH for conduct of the Minn. R. 1405, contested case hearings. However, since the hearings must follow release of the draft EIS, the date for hearings cannot be set until the OES completes the EIS scoping process and determines the schedule for completion of the EIS. The PUC can refer the docket to the OAH for hearing at this time, with the understanding that the OES will work with the OAH to establish a schedule once the EIS scoping process is complete.

## STAFF ANALYSIS AND COMMENTS

EFP staff conducted a completeness review of the route permit application and conclude that the application meets the content requirements of Minn. R. 7849.5220, subp. 2 and 3. EFP staff recommends the Commission accept the application with the understanding that if additional information is requested of the applicants by the OES EFP staff, including landowner contact lists, these requests will be addressed promptly. The applicants have indicated that they will comply with requests for additional information from the Commission or the OES. The PUC's acceptance of the application will allow EFP staff to initiate and conduct the public participation and environmental review processes.

Alternatives to the proposed route may be identified during the routing process. As proposed in the attached Draft Public Participation Plan, landowners and local governments will be notified by letter that they may be located within or near a newly proposed alternative. Letters will include information on the project to date as well as that of the transmission line routing process.

In analyzing the merits of establishing an advisory task force for the project, EFP staff considered four characteristics: size, complexity, known or anticipated controversy, and sensitive resources.

**Project Size.** At approximately 237 miles in length, the project area is extensive. The requested route width is 1,000 feet, with a few exceptions. The proposed right-of way width within the proposed route is 150 feet.

**Complexity.** While the proposed route is great in distance, it is relatively straight forward. Approximately 76 percent of the proposed route uses or parallels existing utilities (electric transmission and pipeline facilities), roads, and railroad rights-of-way. Survey lines, natural division lines, and agricultural field boundaries are paralleled for 17 percent of the proposed route. The applicants indicate that the project will be designed to avoid displacement of existing homes and businesses.

**Known or Anticipated Controversy.** EFP staff anticipates a high level of controversy with this project, based on the certificate of need proceedings, phone conversations with citizens, and letters received to date. Staff will seek to educate local officials and local residents through the process about the opportunities afforded to the public to submit comments on issues and suggestions for alternative routes.

**Sensitive Resources.** There are a number of sensitive resources that include wetlands, surface waters, designated recreation areas, agriculture, archaeological resources, flora, fauna, and rare and unique resources. In addition, the proposed route crosses the Minnesota River three times. Such sensitive resources are expected given the size of this project and can be addresses in the EIS process.

Based on the four characteristics, EFP staff conclude that some level of additional public participation is warranted.

Considering the four characteristics, coupled with length and linear nature of the proposed project, a single, statutory task force is likely not the best public participation strategy for the project. A single task force would pose logistical difficulties and would limit focused input on specific local impacts and issues, including the development of route alternatives. For example, potential issues along the western portion of the route would likely be associated with agriculture, whereas issues related to higher density residential areas are anticipated along the eastern portion of the route. Multiple task forces spread along the length of the line would likely provide better input into the EIS scoping decision. However, a statutory task force expires at the completion of its charge.

Recognizing the size and anticipated controversy associated with this project, and in keeping with the Commission's charge to "adopt broad spectrum citizen participation as a principle of operation," (Minn. Stat. 216E.08), EFP staff has developed and is proposing to implement a public participation plan for this project (attached). The plan includes multiple strategies to ensure effective public participation in the route permitting process.

To enhance public input and partnership, EFP staff suggests the creation of multiple focus groups in lieu of the statutory task force. The goal of the focus groups is to target select areas along the proposed route with known or anticipated problems, thereby soliciting input from those citizens who have knowledge of the issues in that specific area. The focus groups would therefore be tailored to the area in which they are created and would likely be more effective and provide site-specific high-quality input to the scope of the EIS. EFP staff believes that, compared with statutory task forces, focus groups provide several advantages including greater ease in integrating citizen and local governmental input, a local focus on issues, concerns and identification of alternatives, and the ability to engage focus groups through the draft EIS comment period.

Based on public comments and task force requests received to date, EFP staff anticipates convening an initial focus group for the region between the Lake Marion substation and the proposed Hampton Corner substation (the south metro area from Elko-New Market to Hampton).

## **COMMISSION DECISION OPTIONS**

### **A. Application Acceptance**

1. Accept the Great River Energy and Xcel Energy 345 kV Transmission Line Route Permit Application as complete and authorize Office of Energy Security Energy Facilities Permitting staff to process the application under the full permitting process in Minnesota Rules 7849.5200 to 7849.5330.
2. Reject the route permit application as incomplete and issue an order indicating the specific deficiencies to be remedied before the application can be accepted.
3. Find the route permit application complete upon the submission of supplementary information.
4. Make another decision deemed more appropriate.

### **B. Public Advisor**

1. Authorize Office of Energy Security Energy Facilities Permitting staff to name a public advisor in this case.
2. Appoint a PUC staff person as public advisor.
3. Make another decision deemed more appropriate.

### **C. Advisory Task Force**

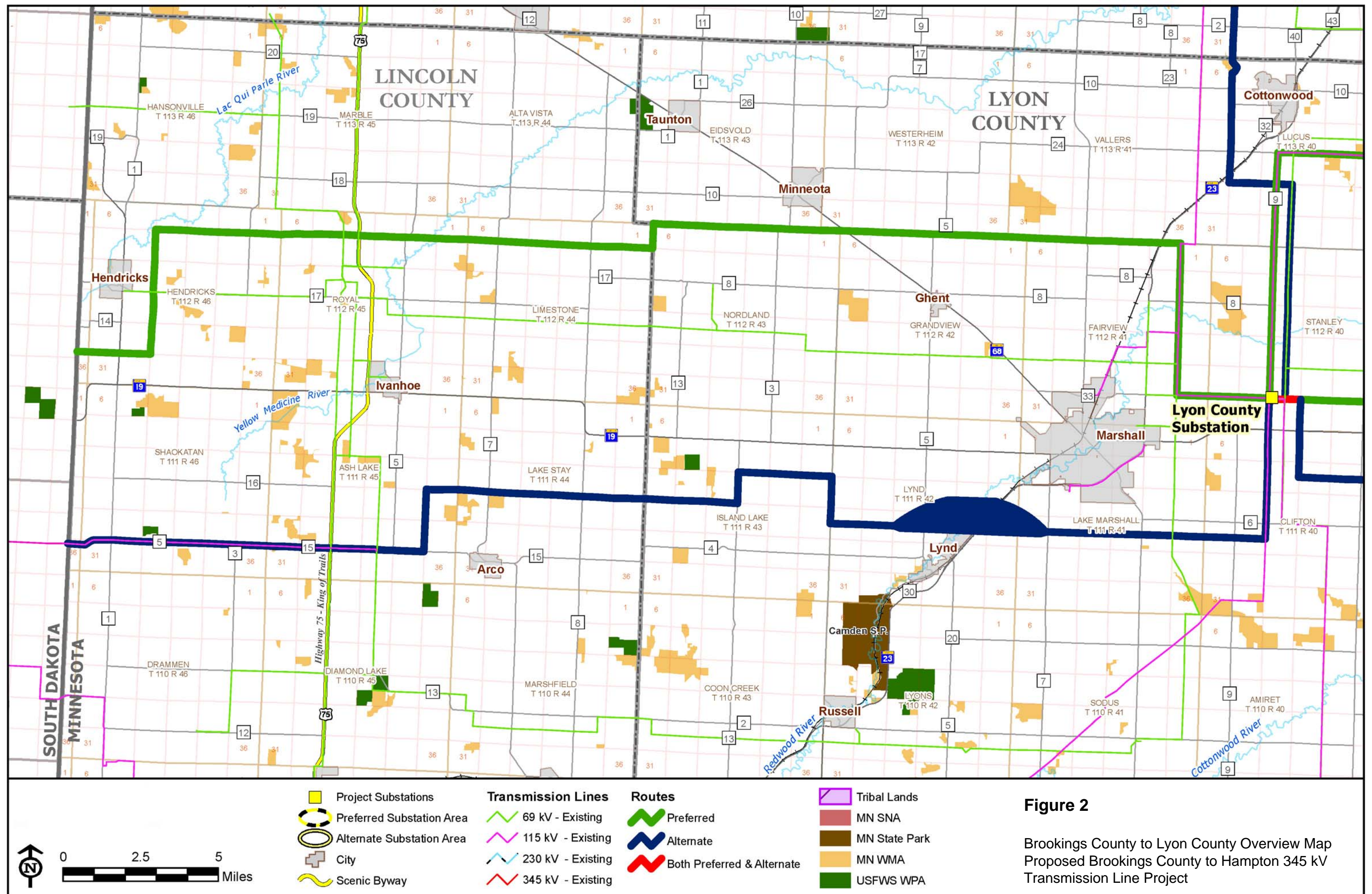
1. Authorize Office of Energy Security Energy Facility Permitting staff to establish an advisory task force and develop a structure and charge for the task force.
2. Take no action on an advisory task force at this time, allowing Office of Energy Security Energy Facility Permitting staff to implement the proposed Draft Public Participation Plan.
3. Determine that an advisory task force is not necessary.
4. Take no action on an advisory task force at this time.
5. Make another decision deemed more appropriate.

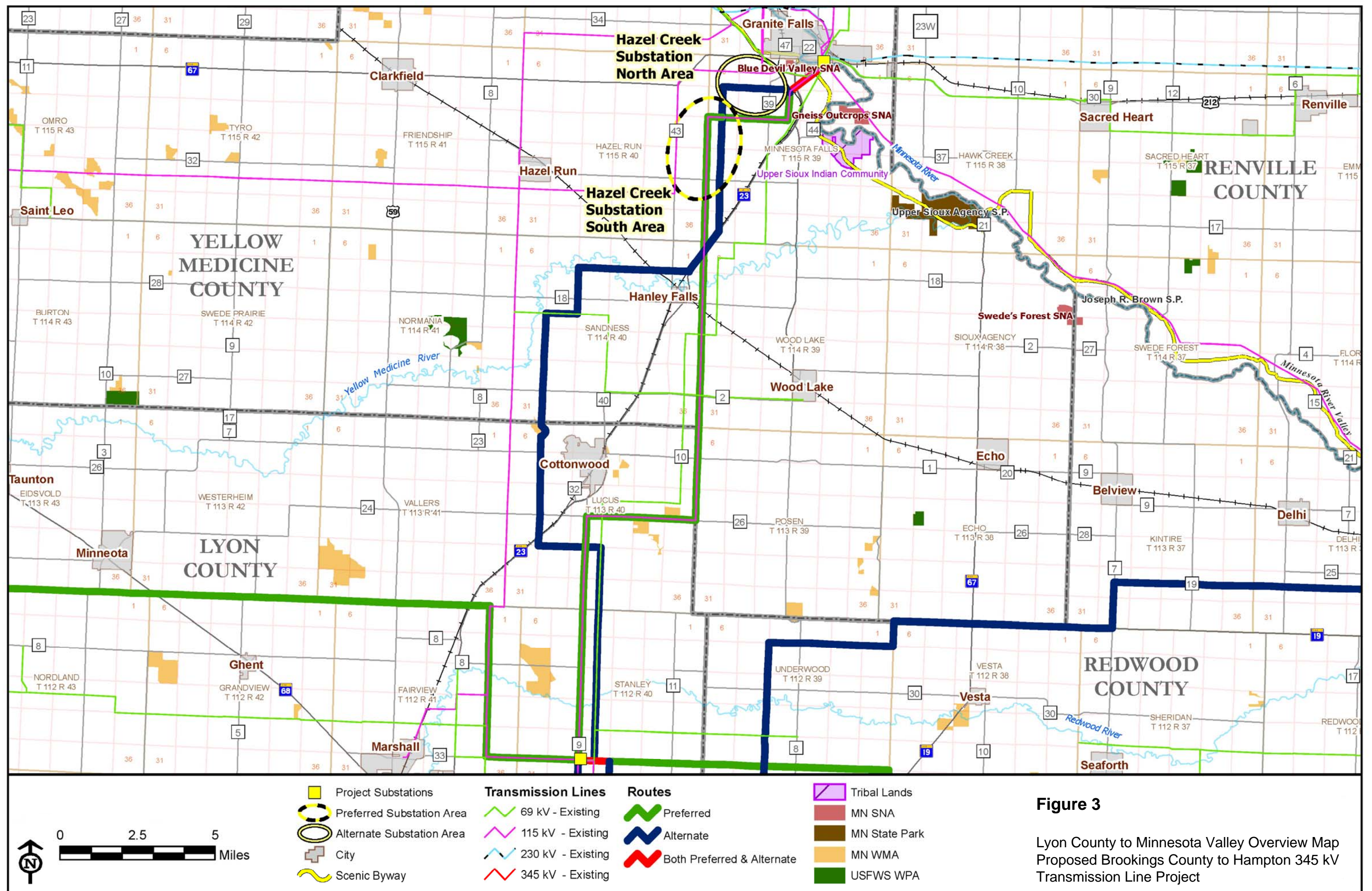
### **D. Public Hearing**

1. Refer the Great River Energy and Xcel Energy 345 kV Transmission Line Route Permit Docket ET2/TL-08-1474 to the Office of Administrative Hearings for conduct of the Minn. R. 1405 contested case hearing.
2. Make another decision deemed more appropriate.

**EFP Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends options A1, B1, C2, and D1.

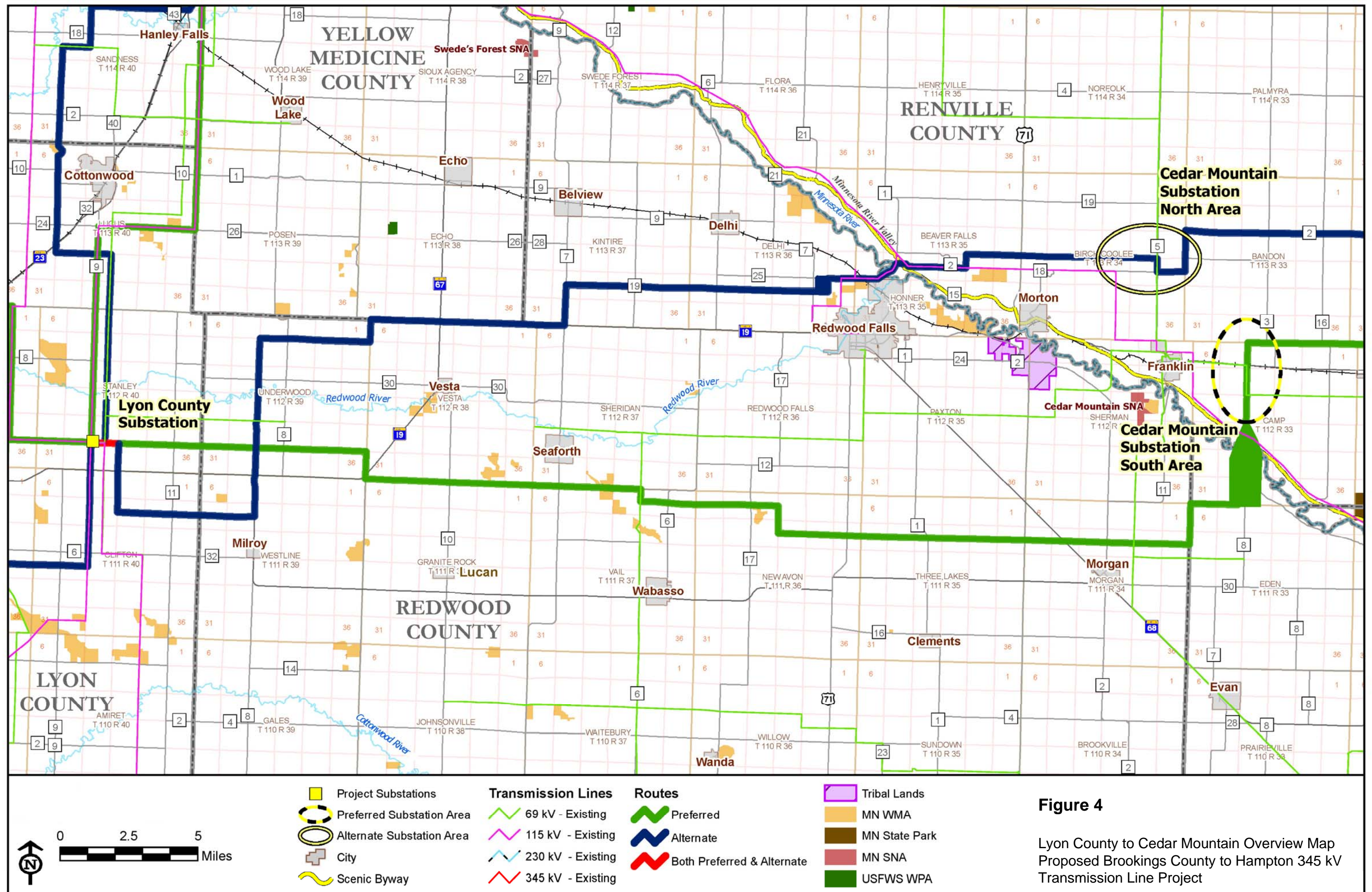






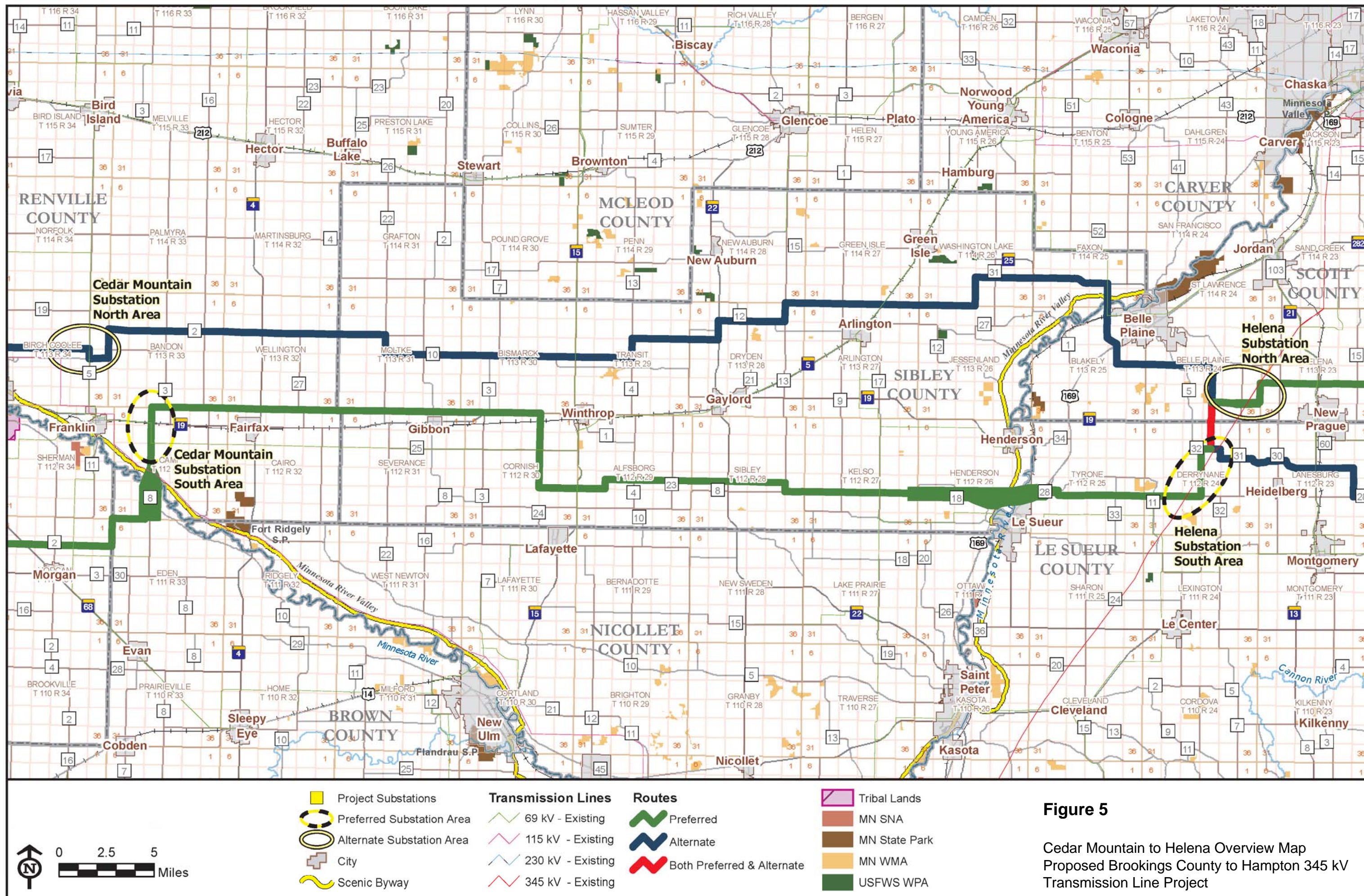
**Figure 3**

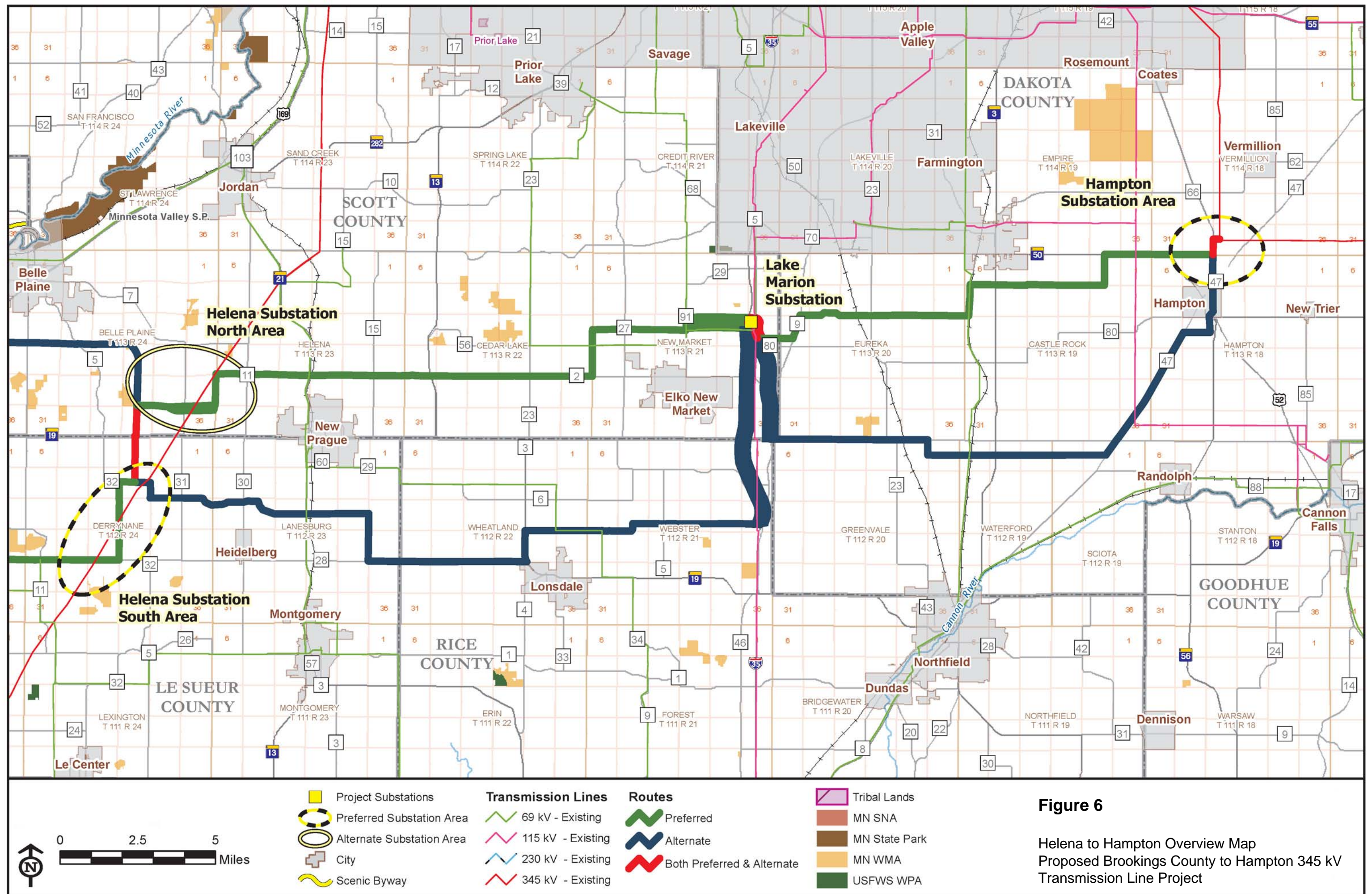
Lyon County to Minnesota Valley Overview Map  
Proposed Brookings County to Hampton 345 kV  
Transmission Line Project



**Figure 4**

Lyon County to Cedar Mountain Overview Map  
Proposed Brookings County to Hampton 345 kV  
Transmission Line Project







## **DRAFT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN**

### **BROOKINGS COUNTY – HAMPTON 345 kV TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT DOCKET No. ET2/TL 08-1474**

#### **GOAL**

The goal of this public participation plan is effective public participation in the route permitting process (Minn. Stat. § 216E.08, subd. 2).

The plan establishes a model for public involvement that provides meaningful and effective participation opportunities to the public and helps Energy Facility Permitting (EFP) staff identify relevant community concerns.

#### **OUTCOMES**

Public participation is effective when the following outcomes are achieved for citizens and local units of government:

- **Awareness.** The public is aware of the permitting process.
- **Education.** The public has timely information about the proposed project and state permitting process. The public knows how to participate in the permitting process.
- **Ease of Participation.** It is relatively easy for the public to participate in the permitting process. It is easy for citizens to relate and submit comments and suggestions.
- **Ability to Discuss and Clarify.** The public has opportunities to ask questions and clarify issues.

EFP staff will use these outcomes<sup>1</sup> to guide the development and implementation of public participation strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Miskowiak, D. *Meaningful to Citizens – Functional for Planning: Using Public Participation*. The Land Use Tracker, Vol. 3., No. 3, Winter 2003.

## STRATEGIES

Strategies that will be used to bring about public participation outcomes for the Brooking County – Hampton 345 kV transmission line project include:

### *Awareness*

Successful public participation begins with awareness. Citizens cannot participate if they do not know about the project or are unaware of their ability to participate. The goal of awareness is to stimulate interest and provide information on the who, what, where, and when of the project.

The following awareness strategies will be used to generate public awareness of the project and opportunities to participate:

- Notice of public meetings will be sent to those individuals whose names are on the project contact list for this project (Minn. R. 7849.5260, subp. 2).
- Public meeting notices will also be published in legal newspapers in the areas where the public meetings are to be held (Minn. R. 7849.5260, subp. 2).
- EFP staff will encourage LGUs, regional planning organizations, and Minnesota legislators to raise awareness and help citizens participate in the permitting process. EFP staff will provide informational and educational material with resources and contact information by mail.
- EFP staff will field telephone calls and emails from citizens and help inform them of the project and the state's transmission line routing process. Citizens will be made aware of future public meetings and encouraged to add their name to the project contact list for this project. Individuals will also be directed to the PUC's EFP project website.
- A project webpage has been set up on the PUC EFP website at <http://energyfacilities.puc.state.mn.us/Docket.html?Id=19860>. The webpage includes a summary of the project, the route permit application, and links to information on the state's transmission line routing process. The webpage also includes links for citizens to receive permitting process information electronically and by mail.
- Alternatives to the proposed route may be identified during the routing process. Landowners and local governments will be notified by letter that they may be located within or near a newly proposed alternative. Letters will include information on the project to date as well as that of the transmission line routing process.

### ***Education***

Educational strategies are designed to provide timely information about the proposed project and route permitting process. The goal is to build citizen capacity to become further involved in the project.

- EFP staff will conduct public information/scoping meetings along the proposed routes. The number of public meetings will be commensurate with the extent of the project and will provide ample opportunities for public participation along the proposed routes. Meetings will be scheduled in the larger cities located along the route, possible cities include, but are not limited to, Hendricks, Marshall, Granite Falls, Redwood Falls, Winthrop/Gaylord, Le Sueur, New Prague, Elko/New Market, and Hampton. Additional meeting will be scheduled based on public interest and citizen's needs for convenience and ease of participation.
- Public meeting agendas will be informal and created to allow for a more hands-on feel. An open house session will start and end the public meetings and would include stations manned by technical experts and include displays and handouts used to inform the public about the project. The areas would also serve as an opportunity for the public to ask questions, express concerns, and provide feedback on the project. A semi-formal presentation by EFP staff followed by a presentation by the applicants and a public question and answer session would be scheduled between the open house sessions.
- EFP staff will provide quality hand-outs and materials describing the project and route permitting process. Materials will also provide information on how to participate in the permitting process, including how to submit comments and concerns and suggest alternatives.
- EFP staff will provide user-friendly comment forms that include examples and pre-printed information blocks that ensure submission of information that is sometimes missing.
- EFP staff will create a station at the public meetings where citizens can provide their address to meeting staff and have a map of the area printed out, allowing them to view the proposed transmission line route, develop alternative route segments right on the map, and submit them.

### ***Ease of Participation***

Several strategies will be developed and used to make it easy for citizens to provide input to the permitting process – including citizens who can attend public meetings and those who cannot. The goal is to provide everyone interested a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed project. The comments are important in helping EFP staff identify relevant and specific community needs and concerns.

- During public meetings, EFP staff will ensure that a court reporter is available to 1) transcribe comments made during the scheduled question and answer session and 2) transcribe comments at a designated comment station to be available during the open house portions of the public meeting(s).
- EFP staff will provide user-friendly comment forms that include examples and pre-printed information blocks that ensure submission of information that is sometimes missing.
- EFP staff will provide commenting tools that enhance the ability of citizens to participate in the permitting process electronically, including:
  - PDF fill-in comment forms that can be completed and submitted electronically and that match the format of those supplied at public meetings;
  - Detailed instructions and examples (print and electronic) for email submissions;
  - Enhanced website notice with links to electronic commenting tools.

### ***Ability to Discuss and Clarify***

EFP staff will provide opportunities for the open exchange of information and expertise between citizens, local and county officials, state and federal agencies, and the applicants. These opportunities are expected to result in greater citizen input, a well informed scoping decision document, and a broader set of route alternatives to examine in the environmental impact statement (EIS).

- EFP staff will convene focus groups to discuss, develop, and clarify issues and route alternatives to be studied in the EIS. Focus groups will be developed as needed, based on staff assessment of known or anticipated geographical or technical issues along the routes. Focus groups will be drawn from local governmental units (“LGUs;” cities, townships, counties) and citizens who have expressed interest in the project by signing up for the project mailing list. EFP staff will solicit LGUs for questions and unresolved issues that might indicate the need for a focus group.
- Focus groups are anticipated to meet 1-3 times during the scoping process. Meetings will be facilitated and offer mapping capabilities for participants to develop route alternatives. Focus groups are also anticipated to meet and discuss the draft EIS for the project. If possible, groups will provide recommendations on route alternatives and issues to be addressed.
- Based on questions and comments from the public to date, EFP staff will be convening an initial focus group for the region between the Lake Marion substation and the proposed Hampton Corner substation (the south metro area from Elko-New Market to Hampton).

STATE OF MINNESOTA )  
 ) ss  
COUNTY OF RAMSEY )

## **AFFIDAVIT OF SERVICE**

**I, Sharon Ferguson, being first duly sworn, deposes and says: that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 2009, served the Minnesota Office of Energy Security Notice of Commission Meeting**

**MNPUC DOCKET NUMBER: ET2/TL-08-1474**

**XX** by depositing in the United States Mail at the City of St. Paul, a true and correct copy thereof, properly enveloped with postage prepaid

**XX** electronic filing

**XX** by email to the attached email service list

/s/Sharon Ferguson

Subscribed and sworn to before me

this 22<sup>nd</sup> of January , 2009

/s/ Lisa Maria DeTomaso

Lisa Maria DeTomaso  
Notary Public-Minnesota  
Commission Expires Jan 31, 2011

Julie Agrimson  
1400 45th Street West  
Webster, MN 55088

Ed B.  
2360 Matilda St.  
St. Paul, MN 55113

Tom Bencik  
22516 310th Street  
Le Center, MN 56057

Everette Duthoy  
449 Fox Den Cr.  
Naples, FL 34104

Doug Elbert  
72631 370th St.  
Bird Island, MN 55310

Donald Entinger  
7551 W. 270th St.  
Belle Plaine, MN 56011

Kevin Erickson  
7910 280th St. W  
Farmington, MN 55024

Natalie Green  
7587 Arbor Lane  
Savage, MN 55378

Ruth Grewe  
Country View Estates  
1000 1st Street S.E.  
Fairfax, MN 55332

Rita Griebel  
1205 55th St. W  
Northfield, MN 55057

Joel Helmberger  
24311 Dakota Ave.  
Lakeville, MN 55044

David Hennen  
3439 180th Ave.  
Minneota, MN 56264

William Huelskamp  
717 23rd North  
New Ulm, MN 56073

Beth Jacobson  
20859 Idaho Ave.  
Lakeville, MN 55044

Paul Johnson  
4300 W. River Parkway, #433  
Minneapolis, MN 55406

Jon Juenke  
21701 Blaine Ave.  
Farmington, MN 55024

Duane Kamrath  
318 Doppy Lane  
Le Sueur, MN 56058

Mark Katzenmeyer  
450 Myrick St.  
Le Sueur, MN 56058

Larry Kerber  
6420 Powers Blvd.  
Chanhassen, MN 55317

Al Klingelhutz  
8600 Waters Edge Dr.  
Chanhassen, MN 55317

Marge Malz  
691 E. 260th St.  
New Prague, MN 56071

Francis Mayert  
2059 Cty Rd 74  
Marshall, MN 56258

Jerry Minar  
213 1st St. SE  
New Prague, MN 56071

Dave Minar  
25816 Drexel Ave.  
New Prague, MN 56071

Nathan Morrison  
26105 Fairlawn Ave.  
Webster, MN 55088

Gilbert Novotny  
25966 Pillsbury Avenue  
Elko, MN 55020

Steven Prah  
33004 340th St.  
Morgan, MN 56266

Gary Prehall  
24105 Cedar Ave.  
Farmington, MN 55024

Al Reck  
20741 320th Street  
New Prague, MN 56071

Kevin Roiger  
67164 470th St.  
Fairfax, MN 55332

Matt Schereck  
2591 E. 260th St.  
Webster, MN 55088

Judy Steinbruckner  
23601 Belmont  
Hampton, MN 55031

Michael Walker  
23641 Cardinal Ct.  
Hampton, MN 55031

Merle Warner  
6950 W. 270th St.  
New Prague, MN 56071

Nicolas Welu  
21663 230th Street  
Wabasso, MN 56293

DePaul Willette  
6438 5th Avenue South  
Richfield, MN 55423

Tom Youngblom  
54380 320th St.  
Winthrop, MN 55396

Nick Ziniel  
27190 Dupont Ave.  
Elko, MN 55020

Robert Zweber  
24321 Texas Ave.  
Lakeville, MN 55044

Email addresses from the Brookings to Hampton Project Contact List downloaded on January 21, 2009.

The following were emailed Notice of the PUC application acceptance meeting in the matter of the route permit application for a 345 kV transmission line from Brookings County, South Dakota to Hampton, Minnesota.

Andreasen	Mary	garnetrealty@yahoo.com
Babcock	Terry	terrybabcock@kmtel.com
Bistodeau	Tracy	tbistodeau@frontiernet.net
Black	Lyle	lalblack@means.net
Boyum	Mary Ann	maryannboyum@frontiernet.net
Brown	Linda	Lbrown@ISD.Net
Brunko	Kim	kim.brunko@frontiernet.net
DeCock	Bernie	berniedecock@hotmail.com
Doheny	Katie	kate73@mchsi.com
Empey	Craig	craigempey@empeylawoffice.com
Engel	Mark	janellek@integraonline.com
Ford	Marj	marjford@edinarealty.com
Fredrickson	Bob	bob@techchec.com
Gentle	Amy	aj22@bevcomm.net
Geske	James	geskejames@gmail.com
Griffin	Gary	gggriffin2@aol.com
Hagen	Dolores	dhagen@closingthegap.com
Hermann	David	herm.dave@gmail.com
Hilbert	Clarence	chilbert.1@netzero.net
Hoffman	Joe	jahffmn@bevcomm.net
Holzinger	Terry	trh4gundog@aol.com
J	G	gjmnem@yahoo.com
Karge	Jodette	countrygirlmn@yahoo.com
Khali	Margaret	khali@mvtvwireless.com
Kietzmann	David	kietzmann@mvtvwireless.com
Koonst	Jim	stierbus@frontiernet.net
Kotch	Stacy	stacy.kotch@dot.state.mn.us
Kuelbs	Joseph	Joseph_Kuelbs@tchd.com
Logue	Kelly	klogue@bevcomm.net
Lori	Mathiowetz	lorimark@frontiernet.net
Mertens	John	john.mertens@co.dakota.mn.us
Miles	Alden	armiles1226@yahoo.com
Miller	Al	kelly.miller@frontiernet.net
Mitchell	Jim	jrmitch@msn.com
Nelson	Maryann	vetn6@hotmail.com
Patten	Kris	pattenkl@frontiernet.net
Patten	Richard	rdpattenjr@frontiernet.net
Pint	Norman	47binder@bevcomm.net
Piper	John	treefarm@frontiernet.net
Revak	Donna	d.revak@frontiernet.net
Sanders	Greg	gregs@toyotaequipment.com
Sayers	Rick	rjsayers@frontiernet.net
Schultz	Audrey	audreyes@frontier.net

Shimota	Gary	hoffmota@aol.com
Simon	Cyril	cynat@bevcomm.net
Sokolski	Adam	asokolski@iberdrolausa.com
Stasney	Patty	plocstaz@hotmail.com
Stocker	Sylvester	stock4js@bevcomm.net
Swedzinski	Dave	underwood35@hotmail.com
Tellijohn	Tim	tomkat@myclearwave.net
Viaene	Robert	wildhorses@mvtvwireless.com
Weckman	Diane	dweckman@cseced.org
Weilage	Terry	terry.weilage@schulthomes.com
Wilsie	Suzanne	suzanne.wilsie@nngco.com
Youngblom	Tom	youngbltom@gmx.com