

**Sheehy, Kathleen (OAH)**

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**From:** Margaret\_Rheude@fws.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, October 08, 2010 1:26 PM  
**To:** Sheehy, Kathleen (OAH); dlesher@grenergy.com; Ek, Scott (COMM)  
**Cc:** Sandra Stugelmeyer  
**Subject:** Potato Lake 115 kV Transmission Line and Substation in Park Rapids, MN (PUC Docket # ET2/TL-10-86)

**Attachments:** Final EA Comment Letter.doc



Final EA  
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Dear Judge Sheehy,

Please find enclosed the US Fish and Wildlife Services final comments on the Final Environmental Assessment for the Potato Lake 115 kV Transmission Line and Substation in Park Rapids, MN (PUC Docket # ET2/TL-10-86). Thank you very much for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Mags Rheude  
Wildlife Biologist

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(See attached file: Final EA Comment Letter.doc)



## United States Department of the Interior

**U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE**  
Twin Cities Ecological Services Field Office  
4101 American Blvd E.  
Bloomington, MN 55425

October 8, 2010

Office of Administrative Hearings  
P.O. Box 64620  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0620  
[Kathleen.sheehy@state.mn.us](mailto:Kathleen.sheehy@state.mn.us)

Dear Judge Sheehy,

Please include this letter in the final comments for the Potato Lake 115 kV Transmission Line and Substation in Park Rapids, MN (Docket Number ET2/TL-10-86) from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. We have commented on this project on two previous occasions, in a letter (7/1/10) and an email (8/19/10) to Great River Energy. After reading the final Environmental Assessment as well as talking to several citizens, I wanted to reiterate several recommendations and add some additional information. Please note that all recommendations from our earlier correspondences should still be considered valid.

First, I wish to address "Important Eagle Use Areas", defined as "an eagle nest, foraging area, or communal roost site that eagles rely on for breeding, sheltering, or feeding, and the landscape features surrounding such a nest, foraging area, or roost site that are essential for the continued viability of the site for breeding, feeding, or sheltering eagles" (50 CFR §22.3). Please note that nesting data provided by the DNR's Natural History Database may not reflect current eagle nest status. New nests could have been built, and older nests may no longer exist. For this reason, I recommend the applicant visit historic nest sites, as well as conduct eagle nest surveys within two miles of the final line designation. Nest surveys are most easily done when foliage is absent (fall, winter, or early spring). Nests of other migratory birds should also be noted, such as other raptors and colonial nesting birds (herons, egrets, cormorants, etc).

Also please note that eagle concentration areas, including winter feeding and roosting areas, are not reflected in the Natural History Database. I wish to reiterate our earlier recommendation that the applicant complete surveys for eagle foraging, roosting, or wintering areas within two miles of any potential line placements before a final line decision is rendered. Because use of these locations can change throughout the year, we recommend a fall (pre-water freeze) and a winter (post-freeze) survey to determine use and location. Activity of other migratory birds should also be noted at this time,

including waterfowl and water bird concentration areas (especially during spring and fall migration).

In our August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010 communication to the applicant, we noted that both northern and southern routes are likely to bisect important eagle foraging areas, as well as travel corridors used by other migratory birds. We have received a report of Trumpeter Swan yearly counts near the Potato River Dam and Potato Lake (by Routes A and B). This information was recorded by Greg Henderson and passed on to me by Sandra Stugelmeyer, and is included below. Currently, I do not have any information on corresponding Trumpeter Swan counts along the northern route option by Upper and Lower Mud Lake (Route C). I recommend the applicant conduct surveys for Trumpeter Swans along the Route C corridor. These surveys can be conducted at the same time as the eagle concentration area surveys.

**Trumpeter Swan Yearly Counts by Potato River Dam and Dean Park**

(Mid-Winter waterfowl surveys are done the first full week of January)

**2006** – No swans counted

**2007** – 9 swans counted

**2008** – 32 swans counted

**2009** – 80 total swans counted, 30 at Dean Park

**2010** – 113 total swans counted, 61 at Dean Park

Thank you for giving the US Fish and Wildlife Service the opportunity to comment on this project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 612-725-3548 x2-202, or at [Margaret\\_rheude@fws.gov](mailto:Margaret_rheude@fws.gov).

Sincerely,

Margaret (Mags) Rheude