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SCOPING AND INFORMATION MEETING - 25-269

Virtual - December 3, 2025 - 6 p.m.

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Application of Great River Energy  
and Lake Region Electric Cooperative for a Route Permit  
for the Otto Tap 115 kV Transmission Line Project in  
Otter Tail County, Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO: ET2/TL-25-269

Via Webex

December 3, 2025

STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER:

Angie Threlkeld, Registered Professional Reporter

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I N D E X

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1 MR. JANEZICH: Good evening. Welcome to  
2 the meeting on the Otto Tap Transmission Project.  
3 My name is Craig Janezich, and I work for the PUC.

4 This is the first of two meetings  
5 concerning this project. The second meeting will  
6 occur in person tomorrow at the Otto Township Town  
7 Hall.

8 Just a brief overview for the meeting.  
9 First, I'll go through some of the introductory  
10 slides; GRE will go ahead and describe the project.  
11 And my colleague, Suzanne, will provide information on  
12 the permit review process. Last, we will open the  
13 floor for questions and comments.

14 Just a quick few ground rules. Be  
15 respectful of one another. You know, reasonable  
16 people can disagree. Also, please take turns. We  
17 have a court reporter, and it's important we get the  
18 information in the record.

19 The purpose of this meeting is to receive  
20 public input and compile a record for the  
21 Commission's permit decision. You can participate  
22 by providing comments or asking questions of PUC  
23 staff about the process or the Applicants about the  
24 project. Your comments will help the Commission  
25 make decisions about the permit and possible permit

1 conditions.

2 A brief overview of the PUC. We regulate  
3 electric, natural gas, and landline utilities. We  
4 also issue site and route permits for large  
5 electrical facilities. Just there's five  
6 commissioner, who are appointed by the governor, who  
7 ultimately decide on the permit; and no two  
8 commissioners can be of the same political party.

9 I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to  
10 the Applicants now so they can present their  
11 project.

12 MR. STROHFUS: Thank you. Thank you,  
13 Craig.

14 Next slide, please.

15 Hi. Again, my name is Mark Strohfus.  
16 I'm with Great River Energy. This project is a  
17 joint project between Great River Energy and Lake  
18 Region Electric Cooperative. Great River Energy  
19 will own 2.9 miles of new 115 kV transmission lines.  
20 Lake Region Electric Cooperative will own a new Otto  
21 Substation directly south of the existing Otto  
22 Substation. We'll look at a map and talk about that  
23 a little bit more.

24 I have Mike Kawlewski on the line. Mike  
25 is an engineer for Lake Region Electric Cooperative.

1 I have other staff in the room, including Madalynn  
2 Brendon, who is the land rights agent; Chuck  
3 Lukkarila, he's the project manager; and we have  
4 Cody Bauer, who is our attorney that helps us  
5 through this whole process.

6 Next slide, please.

7 So the blue line here gives the location  
8 of where we're proposing to build this new 115 kV  
9 transmission line. At the bottom of the picture you  
10 can see the Otto Substation. We would build our --  
11 we're proposing to build our 115 kV transmission  
12 line on the west side of 470th Avenue there, and  
13 then on the south side of 410 Street. It will cross  
14 over Highway 10 and interconnect into an existing  
15 GRE 115 kV transmission line at a new switch there.

16 Next slide, please.

17 Why are we doing this? Well, Lake Region  
18 Electric Cooperative is trying to improve the  
19 reliability of their service. The existing  
20 substation has served off a lower voltage line that  
21 is not as reliable -- is not expected to be as  
22 reliable as a 115 kV line. And, of course, we're  
23 seeing a lot of increase in electrification, so  
24 we're planning on growth with this 115 kV  
25 transmission line.

1                   Next slide, please.

2                   As part of our application development,  
3 we are, again, applying for a route permit  
4 application with an Environmental Assessment to the  
5 Public Utilities Commission. We have submitted that  
6 application, and it's available on the Department  
7 of -- or the Public Utilities Commission's web page  
8 and eDocket system to look at.

9                   So as we first begin developing a  
10 project, we take a look at our mapping systems,  
11 identify a logical location for the transmission  
12 line. And in this particular case, it was fairly  
13 simple, as we saw in an earlier map.

14                  Then we reach out to landowners.  
15 Landowners, sometimes we reach out to them with an  
16 open house meeting. This -- because this particular  
17 project has only one, two, three, four, five -- five  
18 directly impacted landowners by the transmission  
19 line location itself, we made phone calls to them,  
20 sent letters to all of the folks on the route,  
21 including the people on the opposite sides of the  
22 road.

23                  We also contact a lot of state and  
24 federal agencies. You can see here the DNR, Fish &  
25 Wildlife, MnDOT -- MnDOT will be involved in this,

1 because we cross over their highway -- Soil and  
2 Water Conservation District, the Department of Ag,  
3 State Historic Preservation Office, there's an  
4 extensive process working through the tribal  
5 governments and historic tribes within the state,  
6 and then, lastly, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

7 Next slide.

8 So after we get input from all these  
9 agencies, we're able to create our application, and  
10 then we also write the Environmental Assessment.  
11 This is a fairly new process. In the past we would  
12 submit an application; and the Department of  
13 Commerce, now part of Public Utilities Commission,  
14 would write the EA, or the Environmental Assessment.

15 Moving forward, under new state statutes  
16 we write the Environmental Assessment. So that's  
17 contained in Chapter 6 of the route permit  
18 application. And basically some of the things that  
19 we see as impacts are, you know, additional  
20 right-of-way that needs to be entertained. We'll  
21 talk a little bit more about the right-of-way. And  
22 ways we mitigate that are by paralleling roads,  
23 because then we can overlap half of that -- almost  
24 half of that right-of-way from the roadway  
25 right-of-way.

1           The project itself primarily crosses  
2           agricultural properties. The properties across the  
3           street, there are several residential properties.  
4           If we were to build the line over there, we would  
5           have to clear trees that are screening them from the  
6           road view. So generally we try to avoid taking  
7           people's trees from their front yard, if we can at  
8           all do that.

9           115 kV systems are compatible with  
10          center-pivot irrigation systems. There are several  
11          of those along the way here. As I mentioned, it  
12          avoids all but one residential parcel, and have had  
13          conversations with that one landowner; and because  
14          their house was set further back, they were okay  
15          with the project.

16          Along the entire proposed route we have  
17          here, there's existing distribution lines. Our plan  
18          would be to overtake those distribution lines. We  
19          would bury those, and then -- except for at one  
20          location, there's a high-pressure natural gas line  
21          crossing 470th. So the distribution line would have  
22          to come up overhead, probably, for a span -- a  
23          single span of two poles.

24          There's minimal tree clearing. Most of  
25          it's, again, cleared land for agricultural purposes.

1 There's some wetlands, but we should easily be able  
2 to span those wetlands. And we'll do daytime  
3 construction to avoid noise impacts after hours.

4 Next slide.

5 So once we finish this process with the  
6 Public Utilities Commission and they issue us a  
7 route permit, we will send our land agent out here,  
8 Madalynn Brendon, and she will have conversations  
9 with each of the directly affected landowners, and  
10 she'll talk about things like the easement. The  
11 easement we're requesting for this is 100 feet wide,  
12 50 feet on each of the centerline.

13 As I mentioned, half of that -- roughly  
14 half of that will overlap the road right-of-way. So  
15 we're looking for typically somewhere between 50 to  
16 55 feet from private landowners for new  
17 right-of-way. She'll have conversations, answer any  
18 questions about the easement itself. We'll present  
19 an offer and document -- and easement document. And  
20 then, from there on, we'll negotiate with the  
21 landowners on those conditions and payments.

22 Eventually, once that's put together,  
23 then we'll have conversations around any tree  
24 removal again that might need to happen on  
25 particular properties, maintenance practices, and

1 construction -- any feedback on construction  
2 activities.

3 Next slide.

4 Once the construction -- once we get  
5 through the easement process, construction's about  
6 to begin, we will again contact the landowners, let  
7 them know that, hey, we're going to come up and  
8 start working. We'll have to send surveyors out,  
9 we'll stake out property lines, right-of-way, and  
10 structure locations. We'll do the tree clearing.  
11 And we set the poles, string the lines, and energize  
12 the line. And then we'll come back and do  
13 right-of-way restoration, followed up by a letter  
14 back to each of the affected landowners asking if  
15 they are satisfied with the right-of-way restoration  
16 work.

17 Next slide, please.

18 This is our contact information. Again,  
19 I'm Mark Strohfus. I will be working on the  
20 permitting issues. If you have any questions  
21 regarding the permits, you can certainly reach out  
22 to me and Suzanne or Craig from the Public Utilities  
23 Commission.

24 Madalynn is our land rights person. So  
25 if you have any questions about the easements or,

1 really, she can handle any other question that you  
2 might have. That's her contact information there.

3 Thank you.

4 MR. JANEZICH: Thank you for the  
5 overview, project overview, Mark.

6 When the Commission does decide on the  
7 permit, we consider potentially human and  
8 environmental impacts and how they can be reduced or  
9 mitigated. Many of those ideas come from comments  
10 during the comment process. So it's really  
11 important that folks participate, if they have ideas  
12 that could mitigate some potential impacts.

13 Should the permit be issued, the  
14 applicant must compile filing requirements before  
15 construction, which will be reviewed by PUC staff to  
16 ensure that construction is consistent with the  
17 project presented to the public and permitted by the  
18 PUC. They're also responsible for monitoring site  
19 restoration when the project is complete.

20 My last slide is provide the tentative  
21 schedule for the project. We anticipate that in  
22 January the Commission will decide if an addendum to  
23 the EA is necessary, based on the feedback we  
24 receive; and we'll issue a draft site permit. That  
25 draft site permit does not allow the project to go

1 forward. It's a draft that the public, the  
2 Applicants, and the ALJ can work off of.

3 During the winter-spring of 2026 we'll be  
4 back with an Administrative Law Judge. We'll hold  
5 public hearings, which will provide you another  
6 opportunity to provide comments and weigh in on the  
7 project. Based on your comments and the record, the  
8 judge will provide a report to the Commission in the  
9 spring-summer of 2026. And then the Commission will  
10 use this report and the record to make a final  
11 decision on the issuance of a permit in the spring  
12 or summer of 2026.

13 I'll go ahead and hand it off to Suzanne.

14 MS. STEINHAUER: Thanks, Craig.

15 I am Suzanne Steinhauer. I'm also with  
16 the Public Utilities Commission. I am the  
17 environmental review manager for the project. So  
18 kind of building off of what Craig had on the last  
19 slide with the schedule, as you pointed out, we're  
20 pretty early in the process; and there's several  
21 additional milestones before the Commission makes  
22 its final permit decision.

23 The next milestone, after this comment  
24 period closes on December 18th, is the Commission's  
25 determination on whether an EA addendum is needed

1 and then what the draft permit should look like.

2 Next slide, please.

3 So the first question: Is an EA addendum  
4 necessary? So I think Mark talked about this. But  
5 by law applications must include an Environmental  
6 Assessment, EA, that includes information on  
7 potential human and environmental impacts and ways  
8 to mitigate those impacts. As Mark referenced, that  
9 information is in Chapter 6 of the application.

10 One of the things that we're looking for  
11 here from you tonight are comments on potential  
12 impacts and mitigation measures that need further  
13 development in an EA addendum and might ultimately  
14 be incorporated as permit conditions.

15 Mark talked about some of the impacts  
16 that they're seeing. And so we're looking for  
17 information on other impacts that could -- maybe we  
18 can build more information on.

19 Next slide, please.

20 So then the second decision will be:  
21 What does the draft permit look like? A draft  
22 permit identifies where and how the permittee can  
23 construct the project. As Craig mentioned, it  
24 doesn't allow the Applicants to construct the  
25 project, but provides a starting point for

1 Commission consideration.

2 We have in the record available on  
3 eDockets a sample permit with standard permit  
4 conditions for transmission projects. Some of the  
5 conditions include defining a route width where the  
6 right-of-way can be located and alignment, which  
7 side of the road the structure should be on. They  
8 also require third-party monitoring that reports to  
9 the Commission during construction. Guidance on  
10 construction near surface waters and wetlands.

11 Your comments, the public comments that  
12 we receive tonight and then during the written  
13 comment period, help us develop special conditions  
14 and refine these standard conditions.

15 Next slide, please.

16 So how to comment. We can take your  
17 verbal comments at tonight's meeting and then at  
18 tomorrow's meeting at the Otto Town Hall -- the Otto  
19 Township Hall. After that, we need to get comments  
20 in writing. You can comment online at the  
21 Commission's website. You can send an email or  
22 regular U.S. Mail. The comment period ends on  
23 December 18th of 2025.

24 So, again -- we'll come back to this, but  
25 if we don't get comments tonight or tomorrow night,

1 there's still an opportunity to provide written  
2 comments. And those just need to be in by  
3 December 18th.

4 Next slide, please.

5 So, again, what we're looking -- one of  
6 the questions that we have is: What potential human  
7 environmental impacts of the proposed project are  
8 not adequately addressed in the Environmental  
9 Assessment portion of the application? These could  
10 include are there impacts on agriculture that you  
11 don't feel are very well defined or other things  
12 that you've thought of that you might want us to  
13 develop more? What about impacts on wildlife? What  
14 would be the safety impacts, both to construction  
15 workers and to the public? What does the project  
16 look like? How tall are the poles? Is there any  
17 screening around the substation? Things like that.

18 So we're aware that construction of any  
19 physical facility will have impacts. Some of these  
20 are unavoidable, but we want to make sure there's  
21 enough information that the Commission can make an  
22 informed decision.

23 So next slide.

24 So, again, we're also looking for  
25 information on ways to minimize, mitigate, or avoid

1 potential impacts from the proposed project that we  
2 should look at further. Examples could include  
3 determining where the alignment of the project is,  
4 looking at alternative routes or route segments.  
5 One thing that we see -- I don't think we're going  
6 to see with this project, but sometimes transmission  
7 lines may cross snowmobile trails, so we'll ask the  
8 Applicants to coordinate with the local snowmobile  
9 clubs so they'll have enough time to develop their  
10 maps and make sure the next season that's  
11 communicated. Are there specific construction  
12 techniques for portions of the project? Are there  
13 additional natural resource surveys that need to be  
14 done?

15 So, again, knowing that any project in  
16 the physical world will have impacts, what are ways  
17 that we can minimize or avoid those impacts? And we  
18 would address those further in either an EA addendum  
19 and possibly as a special condition.

20 Next slide, please.

21 So this is just a summary slide. It  
22 condenses the previous slides. So if you want -- we  
23 talked a lot about what we're looking for as far as  
24 comments, but I want to reiterate that we're also  
25 here to try to answer questions that people may have

1 about the project or about the process.

2 So we'll open things up for comment in  
3 just a minute, but I want to go over quickly, kind  
4 of reiterating some of the etiquette. If we could  
5 get the next slide, please. Yeah, that one.

6 So we'll get started with questions and  
7 comments. So we do have a court reporter here, and  
8 they are keeping a record of our conversation. So  
9 please take a minute to state and spell your first  
10 and last name, and speak loudly and clearly so that  
11 the court reporter can hear you and we have an  
12 accurate record.

13 Craig talked about this earlier, but  
14 maintain respect for others. Reasonable people can  
15 disagree. There may be differences of opinion about  
16 the proposed project. That's why there is a review  
17 process and why we're out here and want to hear from  
18 everyone.

19 So to ensure that everyone can be heard,  
20 please limit your initial comments to a few minutes.  
21 I don't think that will be a problem with the number  
22 of folks we have in the audience. And if there's  
23 time afterward, after everyone has gone through  
24 once, you'll have an opportunity to speak again.

25 I think we'll leave this slide up,

1 because it gives you some information on how to --  
2 how to comment. You can raise your hand, which is  
3 at the bottom of the screen there, and Craig will  
4 unmute you. You can also put your comments in the  
5 chat, and we'll read them or we'll try to unmute you  
6 there.

7 So that being said, we'll open things up  
8 for comments. Please, you know, raise your hand,  
9 send us a chat.

10 MR. JANEZICH: So far no one has signed  
11 up to participate. But maybe folks are still  
12 working on that, figuring out the technology. But,  
13 again, yeah, if you're on the phone, press star 3.  
14 Although I don't think anybody is participating via  
15 phone. But the other option is to use the comment  
16 back in the lower right-hand corner of the Webex  
17 screen or you can go ahead and raise your hand if  
18 you have questions as well. And, of course,  
19 tomorrow we will have an open house at 5:30 and the  
20 meeting will begin at 6:00, if folks would rather  
21 prefer to come in person and participate that way.

22 MR. STROHFUS: Just to elaborate on what  
23 Craig has said, Great River Energy staff will be  
24 there. We'll have the town hall set up at 5:30, if  
25 you just want to come in and have some general

1 conversations around us; and then this process will  
2 be repeated at that point in time as well.

3 MR. JANEZICH: Yeah, it will be the  
4 same -- it will be the same exact presentation, same  
5 information. And if you offer comments here, you  
6 know, you don't have to offer them, the same  
7 comments, at the next meeting. If you have more to  
8 add, of course, you're always welcome to provide  
9 those comments as well. So...

10 MS. STEINHAUER: Not seeing anyone. Are  
11 you, Craig?

12 MR. JANEZICH: I'm not. No, I'm not  
13 seeing anybody. And I think there's only a couple  
14 of folks. So...

15 MS. STEINHAUER: So comments going once.  
16 Comments going twice. Third call for comments. I'm  
17 not seeing any.

18 So I think we want to thank you for your  
19 time tonight. And, please, we look forward to  
20 seeing maybe some -- hopefully some people tomorrow  
21 at the open house. I think -- do we have that final  
22 slide that reiterates the comment deadline?

23 So comments will be made available to the  
24 public on eDockets. Reminder that the Commission  
25 doesn't edit or delete personal-identifying

1 information from the submissions. And, again, the  
2 written comment period closes at 4:30 on  
3 December 18th.

4 So thanks very much for your time, and I  
5 think we will close the meeting.

6 Does that work for you, Craig?

7 MR. JANEZICH: Yeah. Thanks, everybody,  
8 for attending. We appreciate your time.

9 MR. STROHFUS: Yes.

10 MS. STEINHAUER: Thank you. Bye.

11 MR. STROHFUS: Thank you.

12 MR. JANEZICH: Bye-bye.

13 (Off the record.)  
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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Angie D. Threlkeld, do hereby  
certify that the above and foregoing transcript,  
consisting of the preceding 20 pages is a  
correct transcript of my stenographic notes, and is  
a full, true and complete transcript of the  
proceedings to the best of my ability.

Dated December 8, 2025.

ANGIE D. THRELKELD  
Court Reporter

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<p><b>W</b></p>	<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><b>2 (2)</b> 7:17;13:9 <b>6:00 (1)</b> 18:20</p>	
<p><b>W</b></p>	<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>2.9 (1)</b> 4:19 <b>2025 (1)</b> 14:23 <b>2026 (3)</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p>	
<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>2.9 (1)</b> 4:19 <b>2025 (1)</b> 14:23 <b>2026 (3)</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p>	
<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>2.9 (1)</b> 4:19 <b>2025 (1)</b> 14:23 <b>2026 (3)</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p>	
<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>2.9 (1)</b> 4:19 <b>2025 (1)</b> 14:23 <b>2026 (3)</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p>	
<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>Water (1)</b> 7:2 <b>waters (1)</b> 14:10 <b>way (2)</b> 8:11;18:21 <b>ways (4)</b> 7:22;13:7;15:25; 16:16 <b>web (1)</b> 6:7 <b>Webex (1)</b> 18:16</p>	<p><b>2.9 (1)</b> 4:19 <b>2025 (1)</b> 14:23 <b>2026 (3)</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p>	