



Oral Public Meeting Comments Received on the Scope of the Environmental Impact Statement

Big Stone South to Alexandria 345 kV Transmission Project

Docket No. TL-23-160

Public Meetings

1. January 14, 2025 – Alexandria, Douglas County, MN at 10 a.m.
2. January 14, 2025 – Glenwood, Pope County, MN at 5 p.m.
3. January 15, 2025 – Hancock, Stevens County, MN at 10 a.m.
4. January 15, 2025 – Benson, Swift County, MN at 5 p.m.
5. January 16, 2025 – Ortonville, Big Stone County, MN at 10 a.m.
6. January 16, 2025 – Virtual, Online Meeting at 6:00 p.m.

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SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 23-160
ALEXANDRIA - JANUARY 14, 2025 - 11:00 A.M.
BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Application for a Route Permit for
the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345-kV Transmission
Project in West-Central Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. E017,ET10/TL-23-160

Broadway Ballroom
115 30th Avenue East
Alexandria, Minnesota

January 14, 2025

STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Janet Shaddix Elling, RPR

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1 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. Good morning,
2 everybody. Thanks very much for taking the time to
3 come here today. We really appreciate you being
4 here.

5 Your feedback today is very, very
6 important and you spoke for the permitting process,
7 so everything that you have to say today, and if you
8 have anything to say or any written comments that
9 you want to submit, all of that is taken very
10 seriously and is factored in the decision-making, so
11 we appreciate your time.

12 My name is Sam Lobby, I'm with the
13 Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, and today we
14 are here to have a public information and
15 environmental review scoping meeting. So we're
16 going to provide some information about the project
17 and then we're going to talk about the environmental
18 review process and get your feedback on what you
19 think we should study as far as this project is
20 concerned.

21 There we go. All right.

22 So just to give you a snapshot of what we
23 will be talking about today.

24 Again, I'm Sam Lobby with the Public
25 Utilities Commission. I'll talk about the permit

1 application review process, how a permit is actually
2 granted.

3 Next is Mr. Jason Weiers with Otter Tail
4 Power who will talk specifically about the project
5 itself.

6 And next is my comport with the
7 Department of Commerce, Ms. Jenna Ness, who will
8 talk about the environmental review process, how to
9 suggest alternative routes, things like that.

10 So just real quick. This is my
11 information, as you grabbed a copy of the
12 presentation you'll have this in there, too.

13 The comment period for this project, for
14 this part of the project ends on January 31st, but
15 you can reach out to me any time you want by phone
16 or email if you ever have questions or comments or
17 anything you're concerned about.

18 So the purpose of today's meeting is
19 first to provide information about the proposed
20 project itself and also the state's high voltage
21 transmission line route permit process and how that
22 all works.

23 We want to provide an opportunity for
24 you, the public, to participate in developing the
25 scope of the environmental impact statement, so the

1 environmental impact statement, that's the jargon
2 that we use for the study that will be done on this
3 project. Any sort of environmental concerns that
4 you might have about the project, the standard
5 things that we look at, but we also want to get your
6 feedback as you folks know the area better than any
7 of us.

8 So if you have feedback about
9 environmental issues, and it also includes route
10 alternatives, so if you have a suggestion about you
11 think there is a better route that would work better
12 for you, we want to hear that. Anything you want to
13 say, the Commission wants to hear.

14 Then all of us up here, both the company
15 and the state agencies will provide our contact
16 information in case you have questions later on.

17 So a little bit of background on the
18 Public Utilities Commission and all the agencies
19 that are involved with this, the state agencies.

20 The PUC, we are the government unit that
21 reviews applications such as this route permit
22 application and ultimately we will issue the route
23 permit if it is approved.

24 The Department of Commerce, Jenna,
25 manages the environmental review process for the

1 Commission and will prepare the environmental impact
2 statement on the proposed project.

3 So later on in the process, an
4 administrative law judge from the Office of
5 Administrative Hearings will facilitate a public
6 hearing and provide a report to the Commission
7 setting forth findings of fact, conclusions of law,
8 and recommendations.

9 So just to kind of break that down, what
10 that will look like when the judge is here, it will
11 be a meeting just like this, it will be in the same
12 place. Today you're going to give us feedback about
13 what we should study and then later on in the
14 process when the judge is here, the study will be
15 completed and we'll get your feedback on that and
16 the judge will write a report about that. Did we
17 study what you thought that we would incorporate for
18 route alternatives.

19 So today is just a first step in the
20 process, so if you're here to participate, you're
21 coming at the right time to be involved.

22 So the Minnesota Public Utilities
23 Commission consists of five commissioners that are
24 appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state
25 Senate. We regulate three service industries,

1 electricity, natural gas, and telephone. Our
2 mission is to ensure safe, adequate, and efficient
3 utility services at fair and reasonable rates. And
4 this is an important one, that we provide
5 independent professional oversight and regulation of
6 utility service providers in a manner that is
7 consistent with the public interest.

8 So the Minnesota Public Utilities
9 Commission and Commerce, we're not affiliated with
10 the project, we're not for or against anything,
11 we're just the agency that the utilities come to if
12 they want to build a transmission line. So if you
13 all have comments about what you think about this,
14 we want to hear that so we can factor that into any
15 decision-making.

16 So a little bit more jargon as far as how
17 this process works.

18 The project requirements. Before the
19 project -- This is the project that is referred to
20 as the Big Stone South to Alexandria Transmission
21 Line. Before the project can be constructed, the
22 Commission needs to issue a route permit. And this
23 matter is going through the full review process, so
24 the most rigorous process there is, and that's
25 required for any high voltage transmission line

1 operating at a nominal 200 kilovolts or more and
2 greater than 30 miles in length.

3 For this project, we're just looking at
4 the route permit. Oftentimes there is a route
5 permit that is associated with a certificate of
6 need, and in this case the certificate of need was
7 already granted.

8 So I think I talked to a few folks who
9 had already come and participated in that part of
10 the project. The certificate of need was granted
11 back in October of 2024 for this project, it is part
12 of the larger Big Stone South to Alexandria to Big
13 Oaks Transmission Line Project. If you're
14 interested in looking at that, that is under docket
15 number 22-538. So the certificate of need is to
16 determine if there's a need for the line, and that
17 portion has already been permitted, so now we're
18 looking at the route permit.

19 Again, your comments on the route permit
20 as far as where the route takes, there are no
21 decisions that have been made yet, nothing is set in
22 stone, so your feedback will be taken into account
23 when looking at what the route will be.

24 So I won't get too deep into this because
25 Mr. Weiers will be discussing more about the

1 project, but a brief overview is the Applicants are
2 proposing to build a new approximately 91- to
3 105-mile 345 kilovolt double-circuit capable
4 transmission line. Only one circuit will be
5 installed initially.

6 The proposed 345 kilovolt line will run
7 from Big Stone, from the Big Stone South substation
8 near the Minnesota/South Dakota border to the
9 existing Alexandria Substation near Alexandria,
10 Minnesota.

11 This transmission project is needed to
12 address regional reliability issues on the existing
13 230 kilovolt system in West-Central Minnesota.

14 So just to give you a little snapshot of
15 what you can expect. If you're here today, you're
16 getting involved at the very beginning of this
17 project as far as the public comment portions are
18 concerned. So we really appreciate you being here,
19 it's great to get folks out that have comments and
20 anything to say, so you're here at the right time.

21 So the application was submitted back in
22 October of 2024 and it was reviewed and accepted by
23 the Commission on December 3rd, 2024.

24 The third one down, the public
25 information meetings, that's what we're here doing

1 today. So we've got this meeting now, we have
2 another one this evening, we have two more tomorrow,
3 and on Thursday we have one in Ortonville and then a
4 virtual in the evening. If you tune into that
5 virtual one, if after today you think of something
6 and you want to say something, you're more than
7 welcome to do that. It will be the same
8 presentation that will be presented today.

9 If you are not a fan of public speaking,
10 which is totally fine, there's multiple ways to
11 comment. There is a written comment form that you
12 can mail in physically. You can email us. You can
13 go online. If you have a copy of the presentation
14 or received the notice in the mail, both of those
15 are up there, it'll give you information on how you
16 can comment. Whether you're speaking publicly or
17 send us a written comment, they're all weighted the
18 same, so any feedback we appreciate.

19 So today we're getting your feedback to
20 develop the scope of what we studied for this
21 project and in March to April of 2025 all of your
22 feedback will be incorporated and a decision on what
23 will be studied will be released in March or April.

24 After that, Jenna will complete that
25 environmental impact statement. The study itself,

1 it's a big study, it takes several months and is
2 very detailed. The draft will come out in roughly
3 September of 2025 and then at that point we will
4 visit with the judge. We'll come right back here
5 with the administrative law judge who will want to
6 hear what you have to say. And then they will get
7 that feedback on did we study what you wanted, did
8 we incorporate the route alternatives suggested,
9 then they issue a report ultimately on what comes
10 from that.

11 Also, based on what comes out of that,
12 your feedback, Jenna will finalize that
13 environmental impact statement. So anything,
14 there's multiple opportunity to get really involved
15 and to take a look at what we put together and then
16 we'll keep refining it based on your comments.

17 Then tentatively the Commission will make
18 a final decision on this in March of 2026. So
19 that's quite a ways off, so nothing is happening
20 very fast, nothing is going to happen that you won't
21 have an opportunity to comment or to be involved in
22 it.

23 So, with that, I will go ahead and pass
24 it on to Jason with the company.

25 MR. JASON WEIERS: All right. Thanks,

1 Sam, and good morning, everybody.

2 As Sam mentioned, my name is Jason
3 Weiers, I work at Otter Tail Power Company as
4 manager of transmission project development and I am
5 speaking on behalf of the Applicants.

6 The Big Stone South to Alexandria Project
7 will be co-owned between Otter Tail Power Company
8 and Western Minnesota Municipal Power Agency.
9 Western Minnesota Power Agency is represented in
10 this proceeding by Missouri River Energy Services.

11 So the project of Otter Tail and Western
12 Minnesota are requesting a route permit for an
13 approximately 100-mile 345 kilovolt transmission
14 line that will go from Otter Tail's Big Stone South
15 Substation just west of Big Stone City in South
16 Dakota and it will end at Western Minnesota
17 Municipal Power Agency's Alexandria Substation here
18 in the southwest side of Alexandria.

19 Similar to the transmission line you see
20 along Interstate 94, we are planning to construct
21 this project using double-circuit structures with
22 one circuit being installed initially. Along with
23 the expansions at the end point substations, we may
24 also install what we call a fiber optic regeneration
25 station along the central segment of the line, and

1 this will be between the two end point substations.

2 As I mentioned earlier, the structures
3 will be similar to those along Interstate 94, with
4 the exception that we will use Cor-Ten steel rather
5 than galvanized steel. So the major difference for
6 this particular line is that it'll have a brown
7 color rather than a gray color.

8 We do expect the typical structures will
9 be between 120 to 180 feet tall. The structures
10 will sit on a concrete foundation between 7 and 14
11 feet in diameter, and those foundations could go
12 anywhere between 25 to 80 feet deep, depending on
13 the soil conditions.

14 The structures will be between 1400 feet
15 apart, depending on the route and the geographic
16 terrain that we cross with the project.

17 Lastly, I do want to also mention that
18 our typical right of way for a line of this voltage
19 is going to require a right of way with 150 feet,
20 which is 75 feet on either side of the centerline of
21 the structures.

22 As Sam mentioned earlier, the need for
23 the project was previously approved by the
24 Commission. But just real briefly, the project was
25 identified by an organization called Midcontinent

1 Independent System Operator, MISO. MISO is a
2 regional transmission organization in this region
3 that identifies regional transmission needs in this
4 region. As part of the long-range transmission
5 planning study that they performed, they did approve
6 a portfolio of 18 new transmission projects back in
7 July of 2022, and one of those projects was the Big
8 Stone South to Alexandria Project, which is shown
9 here as project number two on this map.

10 The project is to ensure system
11 reliability in the future and the project will also
12 help reduce transmission congestion, increase access
13 to low-cost energy and also creates resiliency of
14 the system.

15 So, as Sam mentioned earlier, the need
16 portion of the project was approved by the
17 Commission back in October of 2024, so today we're
18 here to discuss the route permit application that
19 was submitted by the Applicants.

20 Given that part of this transmission
21 project is also located in South Dakota, we have
22 also applied for a facility permit from the South
23 Dakota Public Utilities Commission that we expect to
24 receive no later than April of this year.

25 We have undertaken a quite extensive

1 effort over the course of approximately 18 months.
2 We had four rounds of open houses to get information
3 to consider to identify the proposed routes that you
4 see in our route permit application.

5 Starting back in April of 2023, we posted
6 our first round of open houses with a broad slate
7 area where the line could be located. We gathered
8 facts from the public and in October of 2023 we
9 brought back corridors for the proposed project for
10 a second round of open houses.

11 Continuing to refine that route, in
12 February of 2024 we posted our third round of open
13 houses and we shared proposed route corridors with
14 the public. And then in June of 2024, we came
15 forward with our proposed route options during our
16 fourth round of open houses.

17 We considered information gathered at
18 these open houses to help refine our proposed routes
19 starting at the raw study area, then defining the
20 route options that ultimately went into our route
21 permit application.

22 So our proposed route segments from the
23 route permit application are shown here on slide 17.
24 And these again extend from the Minnesota-South
25 Dakota border up to the Alexandria Substation.

1 Generally speaking, there are two route segment
2 options from the border up to the Alexandria
3 Substation, and overall these route segment options
4 put the line between 91 miles and 105 miles,
5 depending on which route is chosen.

6 For the ease in efforts in analyzing
7 these route options we have divided those segments
8 into three different areas. We have a south area
9 that is shown in the blue shades, we have the
10 central area, which is shown in the orange shades,
11 and then last we have the north area, that's shown
12 with the purple shades.

13 Although we will only need 150 feet for
14 the right of way for this transmission project, our
15 application generally included a 1000-foot-wide
16 route corridor to allow for flexibility in siting
17 that transmission line as we start discussions with
18 landowners.

19 So starting from the south and working to
20 the north, slide 18 here shows a zoomed-in version
21 of the south route segments. The south route
22 segments represent between 39 and 42 miles of line
23 from the Minnesota-South Dakota border and this goes
24 to Tara Township in Swift County.

25 The central segments are anywhere between

1 34 and 39 miles long and these go from Tara Township
2 in Swift County up to Ben Wade Township in Pope
3 County.

4 And then lastly, the north route segment
5 is between 18 and 25 miles of line from Tara
6 Township in Pope County up to the existing
7 Alexandria Substation located in Douglas County.

8 If you are a landowner along the approved
9 route, slide 21 shows the intersects if you are a
10 landowner along the approved route.

11 Excuse me.

12 So with the land rights in place we start
13 the survey and proposed structure locations. Next
14 will we establish the temporary access roads to get
15 to the approved route along the right of way. Next
16 we will install the concrete foundations. The
17 fourth step shown here is after the foundations are
18 installed we will set structures on these
19 foundations. After the structures are set, we will
20 string the conductor with the help of a helicopter.
21 And the last step is to restore the work area and
22 re-seeding these areas in coordination with the
23 landowners.

24 Sam touched briefly on the schedule for
25 the permitting process. And that will be into the

1 overall project schedule as shown here on slide 22.

2 So as Sam mentioned, the permitting
3 process in Minnesota is expected to wrap up early in
4 2026. After the Commission decision of a route, we
5 will begin acquiring land rights for 150 feet of
6 right of way for the project.

7 After these landowners are secured we
8 will perform field surveys and that'll help support
9 our permitting efforts and the other federal, state,
10 and local agencies. Based on these surveys and
11 additional permits it will take approximately two
12 years to obtain. Assuming we obtain all the
13 necessary permits around the first part of 2028, we
14 would anticipate starting construction in the spring
15 of 2028 and wrap up by the end of 2030. This
16 schedule here is subject to change based on a number
17 of different factors, but this is the best
18 information we have available at this time.

19 If you have further questions or would
20 like additional information following the meeting,
21 you're always welcome to reach out to me. My
22 contact information here is on slide 23.

23 Alternatively, we do have a website that
24 we do maintain with the most updated information on
25 on this website. You can leave us a comment, you

1 can send us an email, or leave a voicemail on our
2 toll-free number. We do have project
3 representatives available on a daily basis and we do
4 our best to get back to everybody within 24 or 48
5 hours.

6 At this time, I'll turn it over to Jenna
7 Ness from the Department of Commerce for her
8 presentation.

9 MS. JENNA NESS: Hi. Thanks for taking
10 your time to come here today.

11 I am Jenna Ness with the Department of
12 Commerce and I'll be doing the environmental impact
13 statement for this project.

14 So I will briefly go over our role at the
15 Department of Commerce for this project. What
16 creating an environmental impact statement looks
17 like. I'll be referring to that as the EIS. And
18 then we'll talk about different ways you can comment
19 and then we'll get to the actual commenting portion
20 of this meeting where you're welcome to come up here
21 and put in an oral comment.

22 So the Department of Commerce does
23 environmental review for the Commission. We provide
24 an objective analysis of the project for a third
25 party, so to speak. We look at the environmental

1 and human impacts for the project as well as looking
2 for strategies to avoid or mitigate those impacts.

3 The goal is to have a document that the
4 public or other interested parties can use, so that
5 the state and other people who issue permits can
6 make informed decisions.

7 Today we are at a scoping meeting, which
8 means we're getting the public input on what the
9 table of contents of that EIS will look like. There
10 was a draft scope on the front table, and it's just
11 a high level overview of the things we look at in
12 this document.

13 And that could include alternatives to
14 the proposed route that could mitigate impacts. For
15 example, maybe there is an important water body on
16 your property that should be avoided. Those are the
17 type of environmental impacts we look at. And as
18 you can see in that draft, it covers quite the range
19 of things.

20 If you would like to suggest an
21 alternative today or in your written comments, they
22 must mitigate a potential impact. So it doesn't
23 have to be environmental, it could be something as
24 simple as aesthetically unpleasing. And then it
25 must also be specific and identifiable, which I like

1 to say means draw a map for us so we can actually
2 study the area that you want us to look at.

3 So as Sam touched on, you can make a
4 verbal comment at today's meeting. There is also
5 comment sheets at the front desk that you can send
6 in the postal mail, it has my address on there and
7 you can fold it up into an envelope. There is a
8 link online where you can type that in. You can
9 also just email me directly and I will put the
10 comments in the record. And just remember that the
11 comment period ends at the end of January, on the
12 31st.

13 So now we can get into the content
14 portion of the meeting. We can only have one
15 speaker at a time because we have a court reporter
16 here today and we need to be able to accurately
17 catch everybody's comments. State your first and
18 last name and spell it for her, please.

19 And we don't have a huge crowd here
20 today, but we try to keep the initial comments to a
21 few minutes so we make sure we can get to everybody.
22 And you can of course come back for another round of
23 comments, and you can keep coming back up if you
24 need more time.

25 And if you can, the most helpful comments

1 are directed at this table of contents. Or for any
2 questions today, as well, we have lots of
3 representatives from the Applicants here, and the
4 state, so this is your best time to get answers to
5 questions at this meeting.

6 So just a reminder slide of what the
7 scope of the EIS is and what we are looking for are
8 the human and environmental impacts we need to know
9 about. Maybe the specific property that you're
10 concerned about, the same with a way to mitigate
11 those impacts, and then alternatives to the route
12 that you see on the boards today that you think can
13 be mitigated.

14 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. I will just
15 go ahead and leave this slide up here so that folks
16 can see where to comment and everything to do if you
17 don't want to speak today. But with that said, we
18 do have a sign-in sheet here. So I have three folks
19 that indicated that they were interested in
20 speaking.

21 So it looks like a Dennis Lange. Am I
22 pronouncing that correctly? Are you still
23 interested in speaking, Dennis?

24 MR. DENNIS LANG: I guess I didn't know I
25 marked that.

1 MR. SAM LOBBY: Oh, that's fine. You
2 don't have to come up and speak. But, again, for
3 you and for everybody, the written comments are
4 weighted and looked at exactly the same, and if you
5 still want to comment, you're more than welcome to
6 submit those written comments by January 31st.

7 Next up we have Neal Kalina. Am I
8 pronouncing it correctly?

9 MR. NEAL KALINA: You got it right, but I
10 already submitted my ideas.

11 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir.

12 And the last one I have on the list is
13 Patricia Bouta. Would you like to speak?

14 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Yes.

15 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you. Thanks for
16 coming.

17 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: My name is Patricia
18 Bouta.

19 Is this on?

20 Okay. Patricia Bouta, B-O-U-T-A.

21 I have a few questions. And I did get a
22 printout of where the transmission line goes
23 according to my house and it goes less than a half
24 mile from my house. And I have another piece of
25 property, not a house, and it's a quarter to a half

1 mile from that property, of the alternate route. So
2 both routes go close to one of my properties, but of
3 course my house is more important to me.

4 So I'm wondering, and I see the list here
5 of what will be in the environmental impact
6 statement, but for EMF, I know some of the stuff
7 I've read, it's very general. I'm wondering if an
8 environmental impact statement would be very
9 specific on how much EMF there will be at how many
10 feet or how it dissipates or, I mean, specific, not
11 general, how specific will it be.

12 MS. JENNA NESS: Thanks for your
13 question.

14 The Applicants provide pretty specific
15 information in the application about the expected
16 EMF from the centerline, or the alignment, so we do
17 tend to include those figures. So you can see that
18 based on the transmission line and all those factors
19 as well.

20 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: So you include what
21 the applicant states?

22 MS. JENNA NESS: Correct.

23 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Is there any
24 verification that looks at transmission lines that
25 exist now and are going to verify that that's

1 correct? And what I'm thinking, there are certain
2 people that are much more sensitive to EMF than
3 other people and some people aren't. Some people
4 are very, very sensitive. So I'm thinking of the
5 sensitive people, me, one of them, I think.

6 And then also the verification of what
7 the applicant submits, is there anything to see if
8 that is actually correct?

9 MS. JENNA NESS: So we do write about the
10 existing research, we try to look for what's most
11 recent, so we can talk about the potential impacts
12 of a transmission line. Generally it is based on
13 voltage and that sort of thing.

14 As far as if a permit is issued, there
15 are limits in there and, you know, I can't recall
16 specifically recall off the top of my head, but they
17 do have to comply with certain limits with a
18 transmission line. So it would go along with what
19 they submitted in the application or, you know, you
20 can always submit a complaint to the Public
21 Utilities and that will be looked in to.

22 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Like a complaint or
23 what?

24 MS. JENNA NESS: If you had any sort of
25 complaint about the transmission line, including the

1 EMF is stronger than it should be, you can submit
2 that.

3 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: You mean after the
4 fact, after it's built?

5 MS. JENNA NESS: Correct.

6 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Okay. But after
7 it's built, they're not going to take it down.

8 MS. JENNA NESS: They have to comply with
9 that requirement. So whatever it takes to come back
10 into compliance, they have to do it.

11 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: What if it was more?

12 MS. JENNA NESS: If it was verified, and
13 they have measuring tools.

14 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Okay.

15 MR. JASON WEIERS: Hello, Ms. Bouta. I
16 just want to let you know that Chapter 7 in our
17 application includes the EMF calculations that we
18 have submitted for the state project. And we
19 include electric field strength and magnetic field
20 strength. And the lowest in the application, we
21 compare those to criteria set by the Minnesota PUC
22 for the electric field strength. And the magnetic
23 field strength currently doesn't have any volume
24 criteria, however, we do have calculations that show
25 how that field strength dissipates very quickly as

1 you get to the edge of the right of way.

2 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Is that application
3 online where I can look at it?

4 MR. JASON WEIERS: Yes, it is.

5 MR. SAM LOBBY: And if you want you can
6 go to the Minnesota eDockets website, so if you go
7 to Google and type in eDockets, then the docket for
8 this is 23-160, and that's all on the very first
9 slide here if you grab this.

10 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Okay. And then on
11 this approval process of the EIS, there's the slide
12 that says when there will be another public meeting
13 before the final EIS. And I guess once it's final,
14 I mean, there is one period, and if you make
15 comments then, then it's final, and there are no
16 more comments after that; is that correct?

17 MR. SAM LOBBY: At that point there will
18 have been at least three comment periods that help
19 influence what that actually looks like. So right
20 now the comments you're providing will be
21 incorporated. But, yes, the final EIS will be
22 issued in December of 2025, roughly, tentatively,
23 and at that point it would be the final opportunity
24 to comment.

25 MS. JENNA NESS: And just to be clear,

1 you can comment on the adequacy of the EIS. That's
2 kind of the last step of the environmental review
3 process, but that's specific to the EIS versus maybe
4 what Sam was talking about for the route permit.

5 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Okay. People can
6 comment on the adequacy of the EIS?

7 MS. JENNA NESS: Yeah. The best time is
8 to comment during the Draft EIS, which is those
9 meetings you were referring to where edits get made
10 to the document before it becomes the Final EIS
11 based on those comments.

12 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Um-hmm.

13 MR. SAM LOBBY: Just one other note on
14 that, too, just for everybody, there are specific
15 comment periods, several throughout this process,
16 and if you have questions outside of a comment
17 period, you're always more than welcome to give us a
18 call and we will try to help you with your
19 questions.

20 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Okay. So my next
21 question, if I may go on, is on the easement. It's
22 talked about easements and how you get the
23 landowners, whatever. So what if an owner doesn't
24 want to give you an easement?

25 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thanks for your

1 question. We will work diligently with the owners
2 to try to find an area where we can route the
3 transmission line with less impacts with the
4 landowner. That's one of the reasons why we
5 identified the 1000-foot-wide corridor, so we have
6 flexibility of moving the 150 feet we need for the
7 project.

8 To the extent we cannot come to an
9 agreement with the landowner, our last resort would
10 be to enter a legal proceeding and start an eminent
11 domain proceeding to see if there's other ways in
12 which we could get the property for the project.

13 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Okay. In other
14 transmission lines, has that happened, that you had
15 to do eminent -- not you, but companies had to do
16 eminent domain?

17 MR. JASON WEIERS: In my past experience
18 with transmission projects, we have encountered a
19 few of those for past transmission projects.

20 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Okay.

21 MR. JASON WEIERS: Again, it's not our
22 preferred method, we like to work with landowners to
23 find the least impactful route.

24 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: When I hear about
25 easements and getting them, I start thinking and I

1 go, like, some people might not like it, okay, and
2 then that's the process you do.

3 My last question is on mailing lists.
4 Now, sometimes I've gotten mailings. I did not get
5 a mailing on this one for this public meeting, but I
6 got some on other ones.

7 My question is, as the process, is
8 what -- and I don't know about my neighbors. So
9 what about, I'd like to know how do you get your
10 mailing list and who do you send it to. Do you send
11 to everybody that's within a certain amount, a
12 certain distance from the possible routes so that
13 everybody on my road would have gotten one or is it
14 just the people --

15 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: My name is Christy
16 Brusven and I'm counsel for the project.

17 So there's a couple different mailing
18 lists. The mailing list that we used for this
19 notice are created by taking a 1000-foot route
20 width, so it's a little wider, so all of those
21 shaded areas on the maps. We take all the
22 landowners that are in those route widths and
23 adjacent to it. And we rely on both county property
24 tax records and other available information to make
25 sure we have the most recent addresses for folks.

1 Sometimes the land team has more detailed
2 information and we try to incorporate that, but the
3 bases is county tax records for all of those
4 landowners in or adjacent to a proposed route. So
5 all of the route segment options you see shaded on
6 the map, we would include those landowners. And in
7 addition to that, we mail to local officials, state
8 agencies that are required, and then we also put a
9 notice in the newspaper in each county.

10 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: So, like I guess
11 that people that are on my street or road that are
12 within a half mile, they're not getting it because
13 they're not adjacent landowners, I guess. After the
14 last public meeting, I did talk to some neighbors
15 and they had no idea and so I was wondering how it
16 was done.

17 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: This process,
18 again, gathers all, potentially, so it's possible
19 that someone at one of these meetings may propose
20 another alternative route and that is studied in the
21 EIS. And we do update additional routes, and routes
22 are added, so we have all the landowners that
23 proposed routes as we move forward in the process.

24 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: But if you're a
25 quarter mile away, you don't get a mailing?

1 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: That's correct.

2 MS. PATRICIA BOUTA: Yeah.

3 Okay. I think that's all. Thank you.

4 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you for your
5 comments.

6 Next is Lori Johnson Warner.

7 MS. LORI JOHNSON WARNER: Hello. Thank
8 you for the good information this morning.

9 My name is Lori Johnson Warner, L-O-R-I,
10 J-O-H-N-S-O-N, W-A-R-N-E-R.

11 I am here to speak to the north area of
12 this project, where there are two segments and I
13 would advocate for north route two, and I will
14 follow this up with additional details on my
15 reasoning.

16 And within north route one, which is the
17 one I do not prefer, I anticipate to section
18 alternative route nine, speaking that that,
19 according to your documentation, is less harmful to
20 both human and environmental impacts than proposed
21 Route N-2. I'm looking at the Table 2 comparison to
22 N-9 to N-2, whereas the alternative route has fewer
23 impacts to residences, less impacts to forest land,
24 to agricultural land, and introduces one less water
25 body. Those are environmental and human impacts

1 that could be mitigated by using route N-9.

2 So, thank you, those are my comments, and
3 I will follow up in writing.

4 MS. JENNA NESS: Okay.

5 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you very much.

6 The last one I have signed up for
7 speaking is Nate Runke.

8 MR. NATE RUNKE: Hi. Nate Runke,
9 N-A-T-E, R-U-N-K-E.

10 I'm with Local 49 of the International
11 Union of Operating Engineers. We represent 15,000
12 heavy equipment operators and stationery engineers
13 across Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota.

14 This project in particular doesn't
15 provide a huge amount of work for our members, but
16 the projects that it would help to create do. So
17 that's, I guess, we're in favor of projects like
18 this because we know there's a need for the
19 transmission, and we've watched a lot of projects
20 that would inject millions if not billions of
21 dollars into these three states and have to sit and
22 wait and potentially not happen because there's not
23 transmission carrying the energy where it needs to
24 go.

25 So we just ask that the environmental

1 impact statement include potential benefits of
2 members like ours because of the potential of
3 working on projects like this.

4 So thank you.

5 MS. JENNA NESS: Thank you.

6 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you very much for
7 your comment.

8 I will get that slide back up again so
9 folks can see what you can view as comments.

10 With that, I've exhausted the list of
11 folks who wanted to speak.

12 Is there anybody else that would like to
13 say something today? There's an opportunity to do
14 that right now. And, again, if you're not a public
15 speaker, that's just fine, you have until January
16 31st to issue written comments.

17 Yes, sir. If you could state and spell
18 your name, please.

19 MR. DAVID HOVDE: My name is David Hovde,
20 D-A-V-I-D, H-O-V-D-E.

21 And I'm speaking on the south portion of
22 the purple route. And I talked to someone from
23 Otter Tail, and the waterfall project came up, which
24 is -- I think it's a Fish and Wildlife Service area,
25 that's right adjacent to the (inaudible) that's on

1 our farm, so that part has been cleared up. And so
2 the question is, do those same considerations apply
3 to CRP, the conservation reserve program.

4 MS. JENNA NESS: Yeah, we always look at
5 that to see how many are nearby, what's the nearest
6 one, if it can be avoided, that sort of thing.

7 MR. DAVID HOVDE: Is that based upon the
8 wishes of the conservation program or based upon the
9 wishes of the landowner? I ask my question because
10 we have multiple pieces of CRP here, and there's
11 four different pieces to it, so to dodge from one to
12 the other limits some of the preferred routes from
13 cutting across the farm.

14 MS. JENNA NESS: I'm trying to narrow in
15 on what you mean specifically by that question. Do
16 you mean when that ultimate route --

17 MR. DAVID HOVDE: Well, I guess what I'm
18 saying is, is it the landowner that would be
19 objecting to crossing the CRP land, or is it the
20 conservation reserve program people themselves that
21 will say you can't run a power line over this
22 wildlife area? Because it wouldn't bother me. You
23 know, the pheasants, I'm not sure the pheasants
24 care, but for me it pushes the proposed line into
25 some places that are less than ideal.

1 MS. JENNA NESS: And I think that's
2 really important. So make sure that you share that
3 with the folks here and comment on your property and
4 impacts. The conservation easements, it depends,
5 there's a lot of different programs. Some of the
6 programs allow for structures because it is
7 intending to protect species, that, you know, are
8 not bothered by transmissions, and there are times
9 when we can stand those easements so the
10 transmission line is over the top and away to look
11 at it, and easement by easement, or program by
12 program, and they can come to the site through those
13 areas to avoid the impacts, so there's a
14 combination.

15 MR. DAVID HOVDE: And one other, sort of,
16 I should say, different question from another area,
17 it's an engineering question. So EMF has already
18 been spoken of. I see Three Mile Island, some
19 people say off what the charts say are 20 feet and
20 some say 50. And I guess it depends on the voltage
21 only categorically.

22 But the other question is is there any
23 research on GPS signals? If I have a, you know, a
24 planter, and I'm running my whole plant harvest
25 system on GPS coordinates and you come to a power

1 line and all of a sudden you get errors and stuff.

2 MS. JENNA NESS: Yeah. The short answer
3 to that question is, yes, they talk about both of
4 those in the application for the GPS stuff and
5 that's going to be under agricultural impacts
6 because that's generally where it's happening. And
7 then the EMF itself is based on the application, but
8 also what it's saying about these kinds of
9 transmission lines.

10 MR. DAVID HOVDE: So is that an answer
11 that's sort of avoiding the question? Is there
12 knowledge of EMF, or electromagnetic forces will
13 diminish or affect GPS signals?

14 MS. JENNA NESS: I mean, I can certainly
15 get back to you on specifics for that. Just off the
16 top of my head, I'm not being helpful.

17 MR. DAVID HOVDE: That's a technical
18 question.

19 MR. JASON WEIERS: Mr. Hovde, I have a
20 couple comments for your question here regarding GPS
21 interference from transmission lines. We are only
22 aware of a very rare situation where the tower
23 shadowing can temporarily block the GPS signal, but
24 typically that will be mitigated as a pass around
25 the structure where the EMF signals themselves have

1 not been found to interfere with the GPS signal.
2 It's the shadowing effect of the tall structures
3 that are temporary as you move past the structure.

4 MR. DAVID HOVDE: And that's a good
5 answer. Thanks for that.

6 That's all I need. Thank you.

7 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir.

8 And one other comment regarding EMF, but
9 we do have a fact sheet up there that just had some
10 of the most recent studies that have been done.

11 Is there anybody else that would like to
12 speak today publicly? If you would like, you can
13 raise your hand and come up. Otherwise, again,
14 written comments are just as good and that is
15 through January 31st. We've got the slide up here
16 for that.

17 Yes, sir. Please state and spell your
18 name for the record.

19 MR. MAX RADIL: Max Radil. R-A-D-I-L,
20 Max. Lake Mary Township.

21 So some things that I guess I haven't
22 gotten any kind of fact on is the township, we made
23 a recommendation, and maybe you can answer this.

24 Why aren't, you know, existing right of
25 ways followed more closely? We've got the state

1 roads, we've got the railroad that goes through the
2 area, why aren't those types of areas followed more
3 than, you know, in this case, at least in our
4 township, there's a couple places where it actually
5 splits farms in half. I guess my question is why
6 aren't those followed more closely? It would be
7 less impact, they've got the right of way there
8 already, and it would be basically doubling the use
9 of the existing right of way.

10 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thank you for your
11 comment.

12 Certainly, the existing corridor, such as
13 existing roads, section lines, property lines, do
14 offer an opportunity to minimize impacts for
15 landowners so we have factored those into our
16 proposals. But, indeed, if there are other ideas
17 you have, we would encourage you to submit some
18 other alternatives.

19 MR. MAX RADIL: As a county, we did
20 submit those comments earlier. We're also worried
21 about what they mentioned -- or you mentioned the
22 GPS. A lot of the farmers now are using GPS for
23 guidance on equipment, and we use it at home, and
24 that, you know, could be an issue for us.

25 Also, kind of like, you know, there is an

1 already existing high voltage line through the area
2 that you don't have to, I assume, want the two
3 magnetic fields, and is that going to be an issue in
4 areas where those two bodies have been crossed? You
5 know, are we talking about magnetic fields from one
6 line now, or you've got two and you'll be
7 multiplying that with two lines. Is there -- is
8 that going to be taken into effect where lines
9 cross?

10 MS. JENNA NESS: Yeah, absolutely. I
11 mean, if you want more specifics, we'll look at
12 where alternatives are to what people add to the
13 record and what can possibly conflict with that and
14 look at the worst-case scenario and talk about it
15 that way, and talk about those impacts and also
16 discuss if those can be mitigated. Or if the impact
17 is too high, you know, there's other venues that we
18 would analyze in the EIS.

19 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir, for your
20 comments.

21 Is there any other folks looking to speak
22 publicly today?

23 If we're out of commenters, I'll
24 reiterate how you can comment in writing, and we
25 don't want to take up any more of your time if there

1 aren't any more comments.

2 So going once, going twice? Any last
3 folks?

4 All right. Well, before we end, don't
5 forget, it looks like there's a lot of cookies back
6 there, so help yourself if you want a cookie.

7 Again, if you have any questions, reach
8 out to us. And we do have the virtual meeting on
9 Thursday at 6:00 if you think of anything and you
10 want to attend again.

11 Thank you for coming today and for your
12 comments, they really matter and we appreciate you
13 being here.

14 Thank you all for coming.

15 (Proceeding concluded at 12:00 p.m.)

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SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 23-160

GLENWOOD - JANUARY 14, 2025 - 6:00 P.M.

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Application for a Route Permit for
the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345-kV Transmission
Project in West-Central Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. E017,ET10/TL-23-160

Lakeside Ballroom
180 South Lakeshore Drive
Glenwood, Minnesota

January 14, 2025

STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Janet Shaddix Elling, RPR

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1 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right, folks. Thanks
2 very much for coming tonight.

3 My name is Sam Lobby, I'm with the state
4 Public Utilities Commission.

5 We're here tonight to have a public
6 information and environmental review scoping meeting
7 on the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345 kV
8 Transmission Project in West-Central Minnesota, PUC
9 docket 23-160.

10 So we did have one meeting earlier today
11 in Alexandria, we've got this one tonight, of
12 course, and two more tomorrow, and another in-person
13 on Thursday and a virtual on Thursday evening. All
14 of the same information is going to be presented at
15 every meeting. So you're welcome to attend the
16 virtual meeting if you think of something later, you
17 can also send us your written comments until the
18 comment period closes on January 31st.

19 So the meeting agenda for tonight. I am
20 Sam Lobby with the Public Utilities Commission and I
21 will talk about the permit application review
22 process that the Public Utilities Commission will go
23 through for this project.

24 Next, Jason Weiers with Otter Tail Power
25 Company will be talking about the proposed project

1 itself.

2 And then after that, Jenna Ness with the
3 Department of Commerce will talk about the
4 environmental review.

5 So you're going to hear the term
6 environmental impact statement, that's the technical
7 jargon for the environmental study that's going to
8 take place. And so tonight is about getting
9 feedback from you all on what should be included in
10 that study.

11 So you may have questions and comments,
12 we will do the best we can to answer any questions
13 you have. And to let you know how this works,
14 tonight is about getting your feedback on what we
15 should study, so there might be questions that we
16 can't answer yet because to get your question
17 answered we can do the study and later we'll come
18 back with an answer. So if we can't answer
19 something, we can certainly look into it.

20 So this is just my contact information.
21 If you grabbed a copy of the meeting presentation
22 you can find it in there. You can contact me at any
23 time. And the comment period for this part of the
24 process, this is the very beginning of the process,
25 so you've come at the right time to give us your

1 feedback, that comment period ends on January 31st.
2 But even if you have any questions or anything that
3 you want to talk to me about after the comment
4 period you can always reach out to me.

5 So tonight the purpose of the meeting is
6 to provide information about the proposed project
7 itself as well as the state's high voltage
8 transmission line route permit process.

9 We want to provide an opportunity for you
10 all, the public, an opportunity to participate in
11 developing the scope of the environmental impact
12 statement, so that's the study that we're going to
13 be doing and we want your feedback on what we should
14 study. This will include comments on potential
15 impacts of the proposed project, as well as
16 commenting on the minimize, mitigate, and avoid
17 potential impacts. And that can include proposing
18 alternative routes or route segments for
19 consideration.

20 So the maps that you're seeing tonight
21 are proposed, but they're not set in stone. If you
22 have any comments or anything, feedback that you
23 want to get back to us about that route, that's
24 something that Jenna can study in her review.

25 We'll also provide contact information,

1 I've already provided mine, in case you have
2 questions later.

3 So a little bit of context and
4 background.

5 The different government agencies that
6 are involved in this are the Public Utilities
7 Commission, we are the government unit that reviews
8 the applications on route permits in Minnesota, so
9 anybody who wants to build a line has to come
10 through us. We're not for or against any projects.

11 Another governmental unit is the
12 Department of Commerce. Jenna Ness works for the
13 for the Commission and prepares an environmental
14 impact statement on the proposed project.

15 Later in the process, an administrative
16 law judge from the Office of Administrative Hearings
17 will facilitate a public hearing and then provide a
18 report to the Commission setting forth findings of
19 fact, conclusions of law, and recommendations on the
20 proposed project.

21 So to give you a sense of what that would
22 look like tonight in this meeting, we're going to
23 get your feedback on what to study and then I'll
24 talk about the timeline, but many months from now
25 we'll come back here and we'll do the same thing,

1 but instead of getting your feedback on what to
2 study, the study will be completed and you will have
3 time to react to that and give us your feedback and
4 that meeting will be overseen by a judge who is
5 impartial that and will go into her report.

6 So the Minnesota Public Utilities
7 Commission consists of five commissioners appointed
8 by the governor and confirmed by the Senate. We
9 regulate three service industries, electricity,
10 natural gas, and telephone. Our mission is to
11 ensure safe, adequate, and efficient utility
12 services at fair and reasonable rates. We provide
13 independent professional oversight and regulation of
14 utility service providers in a manner that is
15 consistent with the public interest.

16 So in order for this type of project to
17 get permitted, this is a little bit more jargon
18 here, so I'll try to explain that so it makes sense.

19 The Big Stone South to Alexandria
20 transmission line, in order for it to be constructed
21 it must get a route permit and so this is going to
22 go through the full review process. The full review
23 process is the most rigorous review process there
24 is, and that's required for any high voltage
25 transmission line operating at a nominal voltage of

1 200 kilovolts or more and greater than 30 miles in
2 length.

3 Oftentimes when these projects go through
4 there will also be a certificate of need associated
5 with it that we talk about at the same time. In
6 this case, the certificate of need was granted back
7 in October of 2024 for this project, as far as the
8 larger project, the Big Stone South to Alexandria to
9 Big Oaks Transmission Project, the docket number for
10 that was 22-538.

11 If you're interested in looking back on
12 that, if you have a copy of the meeting
13 presentation, you can look it up in our eDocket
14 system, 22-538, and there's instructions in how to
15 access that.

16 So in this case, the certificate of need
17 was already -- has already gone through, and this
18 meeting and this process is just about the route
19 itself, the need has already been granted.

20 So the proposed project, I won't go too
21 deep into this because Mr. Weiers is going to talk
22 more about that. The Applicants are proposing to
23 build a new approximately 91- to 105-mile 345 kV
24 double circuit-capable transmission line. Only one
25 circuit will be installed initially.

1 The proposed 345 kV line will run from
2 the Big Stone South Substation near the Minnesota-
3 South Dakota border to the existing Alexandria
4 Substation near Alexandria, Minnesota.

5 The transmission project is needed to
6 address regional reliability issues on the existing
7 230-kilovolt system in western and central
8 Minnesota.

9 So just to give you a sense of the
10 timeline. If you're here tonight, you're are here
11 at the right time to get involved and give us your
12 feedback so we can incorporate your concerns or
13 comments or at least look into those concerns and
14 comments. So we appreciate you being here tonight
15 and taking your time to work through this process.

16 I will say that the five commissioners
17 that are appointed by the governor, they take all
18 public comments very seriously and the feedback that
19 we get from you all that comes in and make a final
20 decision.

21 So the application was initially
22 submitted in October of 2024 and the application was
23 accepted in December of 2024. That third line down,
24 the public information meetings, that's where we're
25 at tonight, so, again, we've got today, tomorrow,

1 and Thursday meetings, and then the comment period
2 is until January 31st.

3 Once we get your comments, Jenna is going
4 to incorporate those and make a scoping decision,
5 and so that scoping decision is what should be
6 studied and so your comments tonight will help
7 inform what we study. That will happen in March and
8 April and she will go ahead and do that study, and
9 so nine months from now, it's a very intensive
10 study, that is the draft environmental impact
11 statement that will come out and you'll have time --
12 we'll submit that online so you will have a chance
13 to look at it, like a couple weeks a month or maybe
14 even longer to see what we're interested in.

15 Then I mentioned the judge will come for
16 public hearings, so that's where we come back here
17 again and it will be the same type of meeting, it
18 will look just like this, but instead of what should
19 be studied it will be what did we study and what do
20 you think about that. Did we miss anything? Based
21 on that feedback, Jenna can update the environmental
22 impact statement and then the Final EIS will be
23 issued tentatively in December of 2025. And then
24 the judge will file a report and the Commission will
25 make a final decision tentatively in March of 2026.

1 So we've got quite a ways to go. There's
2 a number of opportunities for the public to comment
3 and so we do want to hear from you on any feedback
4 that you have. It can be really useful as far as
5 making any decisions.

6 Once again, thanks for coming tonight,
7 and I'm going to hand it over to Jason for his
8 comments.

9 MR. JAMES WEIERS: Thank you.

10 All right. Thank you, Sam.

11 As Sam said, I'm Jason Weiers, manager of
12 transmission project development at Otter Tail Power
13 Company and the next few slides will provide a brief
14 overview about the Big Stone South to Alexandria
15 Project.

16 The Big Stone South to Alexandria Project
17 will be jointly owned between Otter Tail and Western
18 Municipal Power Agency. Western Minnesota is being
19 represented in this docket by Missouri River Energy
20 Services.

21 The project that Otter Tail and Western
22 Minnesota are requesting is a route permit for
23 approximately a 100-mile 345 kilovolt high voltage
24 transmission from Otter Tail's Big Stone South
25 Substation just west of Big Stone City, South

1 Dakota, to Western Minnesota's Alexandria Substation
2 on the southwest side of the city of Alexandria.

3 Similar to the existing lines you see
4 along Interstate 94, we are planning to construct
5 this line using double-circuit-capable structures
6 and only install one circuit at this time. Along
7 with expansions at the end point substations, we may
8 also install what we refer to as a fiber optic
9 regeneration station and this will be along the
10 central segment of the project. This fiber optic
11 regeneration station will be used to amplify the
12 communication signals between the two end point
13 substations.

14 As I mentioned earlier, the structures
15 for the transmission line will look similar to those
16 along Interstate 94, with the exception that we do
17 plan to use what we call Cor-Ten steel rather than
18 galvanized steel, so the structures for this project
19 will look to be more of a brown color rather than a
20 gray color.

21 We do expect a typical structure will be
22 between 120 and 180 feet tall. The structures will
23 sit on a concrete foundation and that'll be anywhere
24 between 7 to 14 feet in diameter, and that
25 foundation may be anywhere between 25 and 80 feet

1 deep, depending on soil conditions. These
2 structures will be between 400 and 1400 feet apart,
3 depending on the route that is selected and the
4 geographic terrain that we will be traversing.

5 Lastly, our typical right-of-way width
6 for a 345 kilovolt transmission line will be 150
7 feet wide, and that includes 75 feet on either side
8 of the centerline of the structures.

9 Sam talked earlier about the certificate
10 of need process in Minnesota, and as Sam mentioned,
11 the Minnesota Commission approved a certificate of
12 need back in October of 2024.

13 The project came from the Midcontinent
14 Independent System Operator, who is the regional
15 transmission organization within this region. And
16 one of their duties is to perform transmission
17 planning studies in this region to identify future
18 transmission needs. They launched a study about
19 four years ago that we call the long-range
20 transmission planning study, and out of that effort
21 came a recommendation for 18 new transmission
22 projects that are needed to help ensure a reliable
23 and resilient transmission system in the Midwest.
24 The Big Stone South to Alexandria Project is shown
25 on this map as project number two. The project is

1 needed to ensure the system maintains reliability.
2 The project will also reduce transmission congestion
3 and help increase access to low-cost energy and also
4 increase resiliency in extreme weather conditions.

5 So given that the certificate of need has
6 already been approved by the Commission, tonight's
7 focus, as Sam mentioned, is the scope of the
8 environmental review related to the route permit
9 application, which Otter Tail and Western Minnesota
10 filed with the state back in October of 2024.

11 Given that this transmission line is
12 located in South Dakota as well, we have also
13 applied for a facility permit from the South Dakota
14 Public Utilities Commission, and we expect to
15 receive a decision on that facility permit
16 application no later than April of this year.

17 We have undertaken an extensive effort
18 over the course of approximately 18 months with four
19 rounds of public open houses to gather information
20 that we considered to identify the proposed routes
21 that appear in our route permit application.

22 Starting in April of 2023, we shared a
23 broad study area at our first round of open houses
24 outlining boundaries where we were considering the
25 proposed routes for the project. Through the course

1 of gathering feedback from the public, we came
2 forward with the proposed project corridors in
3 October of 2023 during our second round of open
4 houses. We continued to gather information and
5 refine our routes and in February of 2024 we shared
6 our proposed route corridors during our third round
7 of open houses. Finally, in June of 2024, we hosted
8 our fourth round of open houses sharing our proposed
9 route options for the transmission line. We
10 considered feedback from landowners along all the
11 way during all of these open houses and also
12 consulting with several agencies throughout the area
13 to help refine the routes that you see in our route
14 permit application.

15 So our proposed route segments from the
16 route permit application that was filed in October
17 are shown on this slide here. And, again, these
18 start at the Minnesota-South Dakota border and end
19 at the Alexandria Substation.

20 Generally speaking, you'll notice there's
21 two route segment options from the border up to the
22 Alexandria Substation, and these route segments have
23 a full length of between 91 miles and 105 miles for
24 the final route selected for the project.

25 For the ease in analyzing the route

1 options as part of this proceeding, we have divided
2 the route segment options into three different
3 areas. There's areas within the south segment shown
4 in the blue color areas, the central segments shown
5 with orange colors, and then the north segments are
6 shown with purple colors. Although we will only
7 need 150 feet of right of way for the transmission
8 line, the route permit application generally
9 includes a right-of-way width of 1000 feet. And we
10 wanted to have some flexibility in working with
11 landowners to identify the optimal location to
12 minimize landowner impacts for the 150 feet, so
13 therefore the 1000-foot corridor on the permit
14 application gives us some flexibility as we enter
15 negotiations with landowners.

16 Zooming in a little closer on the three
17 areas of the proposed routes, starting first with
18 the south route options, the route segments along
19 the south segment are between 39 and 42 miles in
20 length and these again extend from the
21 Minnesota-South Dakota border over to Tara Township
22 in Swift County.

23 The central route segments are between 34
24 and 39 miles in total length and these are from Tara
25 Township in Swift County to Bend Wade Township in

1 Pope County. And then lastly, the north route
2 segments are between 18 and 25 miles in total length
3 and these again go from Bend Way Township in Pope
4 County up to the existing Alexandria Substation in
5 Douglas County.

6 If you are a landowner along the approved
7 route, slide 21 will give a general construction
8 overview of what you can expect in the future as we
9 build this transmission line.

10 Step one in the overall process here is
11 once we have overall land rights in place, we will
12 start with survey and staking the proposed structure
13 locations. Step two is establishing temporary
14 access roads to get equipment out to the right of
15 way. Step three is installing the concrete
16 foundations. Step four is setting the structures on
17 the foundations. Step five, once the structures are
18 set, we'll then look to string the conductor, and
19 this is typically done with the help of a
20 helicopter. And then lastly, once the conductor is
21 strung, we will work to restore the work area by
22 removing temporary access roads and re-seeding the
23 disturbed areas in coordination with the landowners
24 along the proposed route.

25 Slide 22 has an overall project schedule

1 that we're anticipating for the Big Stone South to
2 Alexandria Project. The Minnesota permitting
3 process is expected to wrap up in the second quarter
4 of 2026. Once we have the Commission decision on
5 the route, we will begin acquiring land rights for
6 the easement that we will need for the project.

7 After the land rights are secured, we
8 will perform field surveys with the help of other --
9 we will perform field surveys to help support
10 permitting efforts with federal, state, and other
11 local agencies, and we expect that those other
12 permits will take approximately two years to
13 acquire. Assuming we obtain all those necessary
14 permits towards the end of the first quarter of
15 2028, we do anticipate starting construction in the
16 spring of 2028 and be wrapped up with the project at
17 the end of 2030.

18 I will mention that this schedule
19 represents the best information we have available
20 today, and that the schedule may change in the
21 future based on a variety of different conditions,
22 such as material lead times, contractor
23 availability, and of course weather conditions.

24 I'll end my slides with sharing my
25 contact information. If you have further questions

1 or comments or would like additional information
2 following this meeting, you're always welcome to
3 reach out to contact me by phone or email.

4 Alternatively, we do have a project
5 website that has been set up where users are allowed
6 to supply comments, they can also send us an email
7 or leave us a voicemail on our toll-free number.
8 The website email and phone line are checked daily
9 by members of our project team and we do our best to
10 get back to people between 24 and 48 hours.

11 With that, I'll turn it over to Jenna
12 Ness to wrap up the presentation.

13 MS. JENNA NESS: Thanks.

14 Hi. Jenna Ness with the Department of
15 Commerce here. Thank you again for taking time out
16 of your day and coming out tonight. I'm the
17 environmental review manager for the project.

18 So briefly here, I will talk about the
19 Department of Commerce's role in the environmental
20 review or creating an environmental impact
21 statement, what it looks like, comments and
22 questions, and then we'll get to the question and
23 comments portion of the meeting after that so you
24 guys can make oral public comments or ask questions.

25 So the Department of Commerce conducts

1 environmental reviews for the Commission as a
2 neutral third party. They offer an objective
3 analysis of the project. The goal is to create an
4 information document that can provide the public
5 what they need to know about the project as well as
6 other parties. And some of those parties include
7 other governmental organizations who use that
8 document for informed decision making. Some of the
9 things we talk about are the human health and
10 environmental impacts and ways that we may be able
11 to avoid or mitigate those impacts.

12 Today is the scoping meeting, as you
13 heard. What scoping means is for narrowing in on
14 what that EIS will look like. If you picked up a
15 draft scope at the opening table, that is the
16 proposed outline or table of contents of the
17 environmental impact statement, or EIS. And we're
18 getting public input on that today as the main goal.
19 And that will focus the EIS on the most relevant
20 information as to make an informed decision on the
21 route permit.

22 So on the previous slide it included
23 human and environmental impacts, strategies to
24 mitigate those impacts, and that can also include an
25 alternate route, if you would like to propose

1 something like that. If you do propose an
2 alternative route, in order to get it accepted for
3 environmental review, it must mitigate a specific
4 impact. That would be something as simple as
5 aesthetics. And it must also be specific. What I
6 mean by that is we need to be able to study a
7 specific area, and so just to be able to draw it on
8 a map for me and that works best.

9 There are several ways to comment. Like
10 we said, tonight at this meeting, it's going to be
11 part of the record. You can also submit your
12 comment sheet in the postal mail and that is on the
13 table as well. Otherwise, you can email me
14 directly. If you have a copy of the presentation
15 you have my contact information. You can also go on
16 our website and make a comment. Just a reminder
17 that the comment period closes at the end of the
18 month on the 31st.

19 So for the question and comments portion
20 of the meeting, I would like to emphasize that we
21 only have one speaker at a time. We have a court
22 reporter with us today and so she needs to be able
23 to hear everything to make it part of our record.
24 In that vein, we also need you to state your first
25 and last name and spell it for the court reporter

1 before you start giving your comment. And we'll
2 also appreciate if you can direct your comments to
3 the scope of the environmental impact statement or
4 maybe some alternative routes, and I have a reminder
5 slide up here of what that is, the table of
6 contents.

7 And that's all I need to say.

8 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. Thanks for
9 your patience as we went through the presentation.

10 So as Jenna mentioned, we can open up the
11 rest of the meeting for folks to comment if folks
12 want to comment. If you are not a public speaker
13 and don't want to speak tonight, or maybe later on
14 after the meeting you think of something that you
15 wish you would have said, you do have until
16 January 31st to submit written comments. As well as
17 there's also the virtual meeting on Thursday, so if
18 you prefer to speak publicly, you can also do it
19 there.

20 So I will call up -- we have the sign-in
21 sheet and a couple folks who signed up, but I'll
22 call up the first name. And if you would come up to
23 the speaker, to the microphone here, and state and
24 spell your first and last name.

25 So I've got David Edmunds. There we go.

1 Apologies if I'm mispronouncing your last name.

2 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: That's fine.

3 Hello. Is this about right?

4 MR. SAM LOBBY: That's good.

5 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: Okay. My name is
6 David Edmunds.

7 I have a lot of concerns at this hearing,
8 but I won't take up too much time, but maybe this
9 would help other people to think about it.

10 You say different routes would mitigate
11 impacts. Well, I'm guessing most of the electricity
12 is going towards the Minneapolis area because that's
13 where they're connecting it, and so the power line,
14 why don't they just build a nuclear power plant
15 right where it's going to end up at. You don't need
16 any power line, nuclear power, it doesn't take much
17 input, it's not like a coal-fired plant, it's just
18 one of them.

19 And because I'm probably one of the
20 oldest ones here, a lot of you don't remember the
21 first power line in Pope County, and on that one
22 none of it was over government land for some reason
23 and somebody here told me there was a couple spots
24 where it does. But they didn't go over any
25 government land, it's all on private land.

1 Then there was also my mom had
2 Alzheimer's and after the first power line in Pope
3 County, and for some reason she didn't know who I
4 was, she didn't know she was in a car, she didn't
5 know there was a power line there. But whenever we
6 would get between a half and a quarter of a mile
7 from the power line and drive under it in the car,
8 she'd put her head down like this and shake like
9 that. It didn't affect me, I don't know what it
10 affects, I don't know if your house has experienced
11 things like that.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: I have not, but I share
13 some of your concerns.

14 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: So I guess I'm
15 concerned about how close it is to houses and
16 buildings. Will it go over solar panels, probably
17 not. Will it go by anybody who has a stake in it
18 and will make a lot of money in this close to their
19 property? I'd like to know if it did.

20 So this is a county for people. I have
21 cattle that will go a couple miles from being right
22 onsite, and I want to look at that and it looks like
23 it will go right between where it could be located
24 right now. So those were just some of the things.

25 Also, how are we going to pay for it?

1 Environmentalists, for the last one, some got more,
2 some got less. It's probably going to affect your
3 land values and what you can do with the land if
4 you're selling it. The whole time you have it,
5 you're paying real estate taxes on it. Are they
6 going to have a yearly fee besides the one lump sum
7 or how are they going to do this?

8 That is the end of my comments.

9 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you very much for
10 your comments. Thank you very much.

11 All right. Next I have Chuck, is there a
12 Chuck here who wants to speak still? If you don't
13 want to speak, that's fine.

14 UNIDENTIFIED: I believe he left.

15 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you very much.

16 The last one I have on my list here, and
17 we can open it up after that, is Troy. Thanks for
18 coming, Troy. State and spell your name for the
19 court reporter, please.

20 MR. TROY SCHMIDTKE: Troy Schmidtke, the
21 last name is S-C-H-M-I-D-T-K-E.

22 A little bit of background. I own
23 approximately 400 acres that I purchased in Starbuck
24 for farming and recreation. The CR-2 segment 10
25 runs across the north side and crosses the Little

1 Chippewa on my property by Bob Hoffman.

2 I've invested over \$100,000 in erosion
3 control to protect the Little Chippewa. I also
4 invested over \$15,000 in restoration. I've also
5 invested over 40 years in the ring line for
6 recreation along the west side of the river that
7 will be severely degraded by CR-10. Central Route 1
8 is the better route for many reasons. CR-1 is
9 approximately \$2800 million less costly and a more
10 direct route. CR-1 has less environmental impacts
11 to existing right of ways and less interference.
12 Most importantly, CR-1 crosses fewer waterways,
13 especially not the Little Chippewa. The Little
14 Chippewa is a key and I hope that it is taken under
15 consideration. We worked hard for multiple lines
16 along the Chippewa to restore that river, and I have
17 a lot of concerns. I'm an engineer, I have a lot of
18 concerns about power lines going across the river.

19 CR-1 also interferes with residences and
20 unfortunately it's still, regardless, it does
21 interfere with residences and that is concerning.
22 Our hope would be that the fewer, the better.

23 And then the last thing is I would urge
24 the PUC to use CR-1. It's the most direct route.
25 It uses existing right of ways. This is the

1 unfortunate thing for all of us, why take more
2 private land, as the previous speaker said. So I
3 would urge us to try to use right of ways that
4 already exist if we can.

5 Thank you.

6 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you very much for
7 your comments, I appreciate the specificity, that's
8 very helpful for the review process.

9 So that is all the folks that I have on
10 here. So I'll open it up if any other folks who
11 want to speak. I will reiterate that if folks would
12 prefer to do a written comment, that's just fine.

13 Is there anybody else who does want to
14 speak?

15 Yes, sir. Please come up and state and
16 spell your name for the court reporter.

17 MR. TOM HOUS: Tom Hous, H-O-U-S.

18 So I have a nice chunk of land and some
19 is very tillable and some is for habitat. I'm on
20 Highway 30 and I think they call it 101, about a
21 mile and a half east of Reno. I'm not sure if it'll
22 go through, but one goes on that property. So my
23 question is what are we going to do to mitigate the
24 habitat destruction for the tillable acreage? If
25 you do take a farmer's property or it crosses a

1 piece of land, is there going to be compensation?
2 Will there be a right of eminent domain and how is
3 that going to work? I am concerned about the impact
4 of the electromagnetic fields that this will be
5 generating.

6 So there's a lot of unanswered questions.

7 MR. SAM LOBBY: Anyone else?

8 MS. JENNA NESS: I want to reiterate, we
9 are focusing on answering questions and that's kind
10 of what's going on.

11 MR. TOM HOUS: And if a landowner or a
12 farmer objects, what happens then? Is it going to
13 be eminent domain? Will it be fair compensation?
14 How is that going to work?

15 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thanks for your
16 comments, Mr. Hous. A couple responses from the
17 Applicants here.

18 We talked about the habitat implications
19 of the transmission line route, certainly those are
20 aspects that would be included as part of the
21 application that we've looked at as well as what the
22 EIS will consider as performed by the Department of
23 Commerce.

24 Any sensitive habitat that's found could
25 likely be requiring some mitigation requirements by

1 the Applicants as we get the permit for this
2 transmission line. And certainly I will want to
3 have you take a look at that Draft EIS that comes
4 out and any possible stipulations or conditions
5 placed upon that permit to make sure proper
6 mitigations are in place.

7 So we definitely want to work with
8 landowners to ensure that we minimize the
9 disruptions to the existing habitat.

10 Regarding EMF concerns, I'll mention that
11 the application did include calculations for the
12 electric and magnetic fields expected from this
13 transmission line, and you will notice in the
14 application that we actually showed the intensity of
15 those electric fields and how they diminish very
16 quickly as we get to the edge of the right of way.
17 What you'll find in the application is that the
18 electromagnetic fields that are generated by the
19 power line are very minimal levels by the time you
20 get to the edge of the right of way. And actually
21 this again will be evaluated as the Department
22 performs the EIS.

23 Oh. And then there was a question about
24 compensation for landowners. So we do not have
25 compensation values determined at this time for

1 landowners along the approved route. What we would
2 do to identify the compensation for landowners is
3 perform a land-based study looking at recent sales
4 in the area, and we'd be offering landowners a price
5 per acre based on the type of land that we're
6 crossing on each particular parcel. We may look at
7 pasture land separate from ag land and separate from
8 wooded land, because there are different values for
9 different types of properties.

10 We do want to work with landowners as
11 closely as we can to try to find a route that
12 minimizes impacts for landowners and our focus is we
13 can come to a resolution with landowners to identify
14 that 150-foot wide easement we need for the
15 transmission line.

16 To the extent that we are not successful
17 in getting an easement with the landowner, there is
18 a possibility that we could pursue a process through
19 a separate legal court proceeding called eminent
20 domain.

21 MR. TOM HOUS: And if it goes to eminent
22 domain, does it go to trial and you have to pay, or
23 just the usual landowner and (inaudible).

24 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: This is Christy
25 Brusven.

1 Again, the Department actually has a
2 really nice handout for right-of-way acquisition,
3 which includes the eminent domain process. As
4 Mr. Weiers said, it's a court proceeding, and you
5 can find when the proceedings begin that often we're
6 still able to reach a settlement. But there is a
7 separate body that will give compensation awarded in
8 that process and, of course, the Applicants will
9 abide by the outcome of the proceedings.

10 MR. TOM HOUS: I agree with the last
11 speaker, that what he said is the best route.

12 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: I missed that.

13 MR. TOM HOUS: I agree with the last
14 speaker, that what he said is the best route instead
15 of meandering east or west.

16 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: I appreciate your
17 comment.

18 Thank you.

19 MR. TOM HOUS: Yeah.

20 MS. JENNA NESS: The more specific, and
21 you don't have to do it orally, you can email me or
22 whatever, but about the specific habitat on specific
23 property, the more it can be less generalized and
24 talk about that specifically and look at that
25 mitigation, and if you want that, I have it here and

1 actually Ms. Brusven has one, too.

2 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir, for your
3 comments. We appreciate it.

4 So I'll open it up again if there's any
5 other folks who would like to speak. And, again, if
6 you would like to comment other than verbally, you
7 can grab a comment sheet at the front and put a
8 stamp on that and mail it to us. You can comment
9 online by going to this website, or you can mail it
10 to Jenna or email it to Jenna, I guess.

11 Would you like to speak again?

12 MR. TROY SCHMIDTKE: Yes.

13 MR. SAM LOBBY: Please come up to the
14 microphone so the court reporter can hear you.

15 MR. TROY SCHMIDTKE: Troy Schmidtke
16 again.

17 Can you tell us a little bit about who is
18 on your team? Do you have biologists, a lot of
19 specialists, someone that can look at ag land? And
20 who is on your team that you can share with us?

21 MS. JENNA NESS: Absolutely. Thanks for
22 the question. It is a very large team working on
23 the EIS. I am the main project manager making sure
24 that the EIS is correct and looking at all impacts.
25 Yes, we are working with consultants and internally

1 with EERA people who have expertise. So we do have
2 someone who looks at those things that I previously
3 heard you mention, waterfowl and biologists, yes, we
4 have people who have worked in wetlands, but, yes,
5 our two consultants we are able to pull in as needed
6 if we need to focus on a certain subject matter.

7 MR. SAM LOBBY: And I'll just add to that
8 that during the permitting process there's many
9 other state and federal agencies and local agencies
10 that can and will submit comments. So the DNR and
11 the PCA, those are two of many, and those are some
12 of the agencies that will make comments that are
13 directly experts on both those issues that you're
14 raising, as well as if there's any sort of permits
15 or requirements that they have, because if they get
16 a permit, they also have to follow the rules of
17 other state agencies.

18 So that's a great question. I appreciate
19 your question.

20 Would anybody else like to speak tonight?

21 UNIDENTIFIED: I would.

22 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thanks again for your
23 questions.

24 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: David Edmunds.

25 A couple of them take that route that's

1 north of Lowry; is that correct? For me that would
2 be something, throughout route two, south of Lowry,
3 so it doesn't go right next to my house and at least
4 it will be in my field.

5 Then because I have documents from the
6 first power line that went through, the estimated
7 market value and damages to the land, and there was
8 just a one-time payment, okay, when that was taken,
9 and today the land is worth a little bit more and
10 every year we pay taxes on it. I think it should be
11 not only a first-time payment, but payments every
12 year, because it takes value. And I'm going to rent
13 that to somebody and I got to pay for that every
14 year. It's not like, oh, okay, get I paid one time
15 and that's for the rest of my life.

16 COURT REPORTER: I can't hear him when he
17 turns around.

18 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: That's what they're
19 doing, and the whole time it's there, and this other
20 one is still there. So I keep track of some of this
21 stuff. If you have to live underneath it or farm
22 under it, I had a neighbor who found it messed
23 things up. And how do you do stuff with a one-time
24 payment? So do you think there would be more than
25 one payment for this?

1 MR. JAMES WEIERS: Thanks for your
2 comments, Mr. Edmunds.

3 The plan for the Applicants is for the
4 one-time upfront payment for the easement. And I
5 will also mention that as you think about the
6 easement that we are looking to acquire for the
7 project, we are still allowing landowners to do the
8 things they do on the land today, such as farming.
9 You're still allowed to farm along the easement, and
10 they're also able to till it and farm as you are.

11 I do want to also mention that as you
12 think about the line built back in the 1970s
13 compared to the lines you see here today, we have
14 obviously changed the structure design to take up a
15 much smaller footprint than what was previously
16 built, and if you look at the foundation diameter of
17 7 to 14 feet at its max, it's a much, much smaller
18 footprint than previously used on a power line back
19 in the '70s. So we are doing our best to minimize
20 impacts to landowners.

21 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: So on a higher scale,
22 the ones that are promoting this, but working
23 underneath it and farming right next to it, do you
24 think they will be allowed to do that? I don't
25 think so. Does it go on anybody's property that's

1 for near a station at the top of the headquarters,
2 the CEO of the company, does it go on any of their
3 property?

4 MR. JASON WEIERS: We do evaluate a
5 variety of different factors when evaluating the
6 routes for the transmission line and balance a lot
7 of those factors in our best attempt to identify
8 least impactful routes for the transmission line.
9 If there are alternatives that should be considered,
10 we certainly are willing to entertain those through
11 this process.

12 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: And can you also tell
13 me if any of the power line will be going on any
14 government property of any sort? The last one
15 didn't.

16 MR. JAMES WEIERS: We have evaluated both
17 the public and private land for the routes and we do
18 have federal and state parcels involved in some of
19 these proposed routes. We have been in touch the
20 Fish and Wildlife and the Minnesota DNR and are
21 evaluating the alternatives and plan on continue
22 engaging with them as we work through this process.

23 MR. DAVID EDMUNDS: Hopefully someone has
24 some things that I missed.

25 Thank you.

1 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir.

2 Is there any other folks that would like
3 to speak publicly tonight? Again, I'll remind you
4 that if you prefer to have written comments, you can
5 follow those instructions.

6 Is there anybody else that would like to
7 speak?

8 Yes, sir. Please state and spell your
9 name.

10 MR. JASON SAFFERT: Jason Saffert,
11 S-A-F-F-E-R-T.

12 Can you elaborate on the 1000-foot
13 corridor that you commented on earlier on the
14 easement?

15 MR. JAMES WEIERS: Thank you for your
16 comment, Mr. Saffert.

17 The route permit application does include
18 a 1000-foot-wide corridor width, and actually it
19 gets a little wider than that in some areas where we
20 have some constraints that we have to deal with, and
21 at other places it gets a little narrower. But,
22 yes, generally a 1000-foot corridor is intended to
23 allow for some flexibility so that once we get an
24 approved route from the Commission we have the
25 ability to move the location for the easement.

1 MR. JASON SAFFERT: So basically it'll
2 still be a 150-foot easement, but maybe right now
3 your defined lines are on a fence line and it would
4 be a 75-foot easement on each side and it actually
5 could go across somebody's land and they'd have a
6 whole 150-foot easement. So then is it 500 feet in
7 each direction from there where you have flexibility
8 to change your route?

9 MR. JAMES WEIERS: Typically, yes, we do
10 have the flexibility to move that 150-foot-wide
11 easement area.

12 MR. JASON SAFFERT: I'm thinking that
13 you're having a 75-foot easement to having a full
14 150-foot easement across your whole route, in
15 theory?

16 MR. JAMES WEIERS: That's possible, as we
17 continue to coordinate with landowners, after the
18 permitting process is complete.

19 MR. JASON SAFFERT: Is this something
20 that would be defined before the easements are even
21 offered? Because how do you offer somebody an
22 easement when you're paying for 75 and you're
23 actually paying for more? Is that what you're
24 doing? Are you trying at 1000 and saying we're only
25 taking 150 feet of it?

1 MR. JAMES WEIERS: In that 1000-foot-wide
2 easement we would limit it to 150 feet wide. And we
3 would engage with the landowners and have it be
4 acceptable to both landowners involved.

5 MR. JASON SAFFERT: Okay. That's all I
6 got for now.

7 Thank you.

8 MR. JAMES WEIERS: Thank you.

9 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir.
10 Appreciate your comments.

11 Is there anyone else who would like to
12 speak publicly tonight? And, again, if there isn't,
13 you can send in written comments until January 31st.
14 So those are weighted just the same as public
15 comments. So if you think of something later on,
16 please do that.

17 I'll open it up again here. And if you
18 don't have anything else, have a good evening.

19 But is there a last call for comments?
20 Does anyone else want to speak?

21 All right. If we don't have any more, we
22 want to thank you again very much. So thanks for
23 taking the time to come, and stay warm and have a
24 safe drive home.

25 And please reach out to Jenna or I with

1 more questions if you have any.

2 Thanks, everybody.

3 (Proceeding concluded at 6:56 p.m.)

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SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 23-160

BENSON - JANUARY 15, 2025 - 6:00 P.M.

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Application for a Route Permit for
the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345-kV Transmission
Project in West-Central Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. E017, ET10/TL-23-160

Benson Northside Elementary School

1800 Nevada Avenue

Benson, Minnesota

January 15, 2025

STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Janet Shaddix Elling, RPR

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1 MR. SAM LOBBY: Good evening, folks.
2 Thanks very much for coming tonight. We're at 6:00.
3 So if you'd like to take a seat here, we'll get
4 started in a minute.

5 All righty. We appreciate all you taking
6 time out of your evening to come here and learn
7 about the project and offer comments about the
8 project. My name is Sam Lobby. I'm with the
9 Minnesota Public Utilities Commission.

10 And we're here tonight to talk about the
11 public information and environmental review scoping
12 meeting for the Big Stone South to Alexandria
13 345-kilovolt transmission project, and that's under
14 Docket Number 23-160.

15 This is our fourth meeting. We have six
16 total, which includes one virtual. We had two
17 yesterday. This is our second one today. We have
18 one more tomorrow in Ortonville, and then we have
19 the virtual online. Every meeting is covering the
20 exact same thing. So if you come to one, you're
21 getting the same information. Sometimes folks do,
22 you know, come to the first meeting, they think of
23 something, and they want to comment at the virtual
24 meeting later. If you want to comment publicly, you
25 can do that, but the written comments are looked at

1 the same way. You can submit those through January
2 31st, and I'll repeat some of that as we go through
3 the presentation.

4 So just a quick introduction: Again, I'm
5 Sam Lobby with the Public Utilities Commission. I'm
6 going to go over the permit application review
7 process. After that, Mr. Jason Weiers with Otter
8 Tail Power Company will talk a little more about the
9 project itself.

10 And, then, Jenna Ness with the Department
11 of Commerce will talk about the environmental study.
12 And so that study is one of the main things that
13 tonight is about, is to get your feedback on what to
14 study, which includes potential alternative routes.

15 So I'll just put that up for a second.
16 That's my contact information. If you're here
17 tonight, you are at the very beginning of this
18 process. You got involved at the right time. You
19 can offer your comments. This is going to be a long
20 process. It'll take over a year to complete this
21 process, so you're getting involved at the right
22 time.

23 For this particular stage in the process,
24 the comment period will go through January 31st.
25 I'll keep saying that just so folks remember that,

1 but this is a little plug, even if it's outside of a
2 comment period, you can always reach out to me if
3 you have questions.

4 The state isn't affiliated with the
5 project, in terms of being for or against it. We're
6 just the agency that they apply to. So if you ever
7 have any questions or you want to, you know, give
8 feedback about the environmental review or anything,
9 you can contact myself or Jenna.

10 So the purpose of tonight's meeting is,
11 first, to provide information about the proposed
12 project, as well as the state's high-voltage
13 transmission line route permitting process. We also
14 want to -- one of the main parts of tonight is we
15 want to provide an opportunity for you, the public,
16 to participate in developing the scope of the
17 environmental impact statement, which we'll refer to
18 as the EIS. So "environmental impact statement" is
19 kind of the jargon term for the environmental study
20 that's going to take place. So the scope of that
21 study, what we look at, that's going to be
22 influenced by any comments that you might have.

23 So as far as the sort of comments you
24 might have, we're particularly interested in
25 comments on potential impacts of the proposed

1 project, as well as comments on methods to minimize,
2 mitigate, and avoid potential impacts, and that
3 includes proposing alternative routes or route
4 segments for consideration.

5 We'll have our contact information up
6 again. You can also grab a copy of the presentation
7 upfront, so that you can reach out to us if you have
8 questions later on.

9 So a little bit of background: There's
10 three main government units that will be involved in
11 this process. The first is the Public Utilities
12 Commission. We're the government unit that reviews
13 the applications and issues site and route permits
14 in the state of Minnesota.

15 Next, is the Department of Commerce.
16 They manage the environmental review process for the
17 Commission, and they prepare the environmental
18 impact statement, which is the study on the proposed
19 project.

20 Also, an Administrative Law Judge from
21 the Office of Administrative Hearings will
22 facilitate a public hearing later on in the process,
23 and then they will provide a report to the
24 Commission, setting forth findings of fact,
25 conclusions of law, and recommendations on the

1 project. That's the, kind of, legalese way of
2 saying that they will look at your comments, review
3 those things, look at legal standards, and then
4 provide a final report.

5 So just another note with the
6 Administrative Law Judge, tonight is -- as I said,
7 is about getting your feedback on what we should be
8 studying for this project. So that later in the
9 process -- I'll go through a timeline in a minute,
10 but it will be around September or October -- we'll
11 come right back here. We'll do a very similar
12 meeting, but at that point we will be talking about
13 the study what was done based on the comments we had
14 tonight. And so at that point, you'll have an
15 opportunity to react to that, and then let us know,
16 did we study what you thought we should study?

17 A little background on the Minnesota
18 Public Utilities Commission: It consists of five
19 Commissioners, appointed by the Governor and
20 confirmed by the Senate. We regulate three service
21 industries: Electricity, natural gas, and
22 telephone. The mission is to ensure safe, adequate,
23 and efficient utility services at fair and
24 reasonable rates, and we provide independent,
25 professional oversight in regulation of utility

1 service providers in a manner that is consistent
2 with the public interest.

3 So in order for the Big Stone South to
4 Alexandria transmission line project to be
5 constructed, the Commission has to issue -- what is
6 another jargon term -- a route permit, and is going
7 through the full review process. So the full review
8 process is the most rigorous process for evaluating
9 these permits. And that is for any high-voltage
10 transmission line operating at a nominal voltage of
11 200 kilovolts or more and greater than 30 miles in
12 length.

13 So tonight we're just here to talk about
14 the route permit. Sometimes if you've been -- I've
15 talked to folks who have been to other similar
16 meetings, and so you may have even been to earlier
17 meetings related to this process for the certificate
18 of need. Often the route permit and certificate of
19 need go together.

20 In this case, the certificate of need was
21 granted in October of 2024 for this project as part
22 of the larger project, Big Stone South to Alexandria
23 to Big Oaks transmission project. So you may have
24 come to one of those meetings. That was for the
25 certificate of need. That has been granted, so

1 tonight we're here to talk about the route permit.
2 If you are interested in looking at that larger
3 project, the docket number of that is 22-538. If
4 you grab a copy of the presentation, that's in there
5 so you don't have to memorize that.

6 I won't get too deep into the project
7 itself because Mr. Weiers will talk more about that,
8 but a quick overview is the applicants are proposing
9 to build a new, approximately, 91- to 105-mile,
10 345-kilovolt double-circuit capable transmission
11 line. Only one circuit will be installed initially.
12 The proposed 345-kV line will run from the Big Stone
13 South substation near the Minnesota-South Dakota
14 border to the existing Alexandria substation near
15 Alexandria, Minnesota.

16 This transmission project is needed to
17 address regional reliability issues on the existing
18 230-kilovolt system in western and central
19 Minnesota.

20 So this timeline gives you an idea of
21 what to expect coming up. Like I said, it's a long
22 process, and this is the beginning, so you're
23 getting involved at the right time. The application
24 was submitted back in October of 2024, and the
25 Commission accepted the application on December 3rd,

1 2024.

2 That third line down, "public information
3 meetings," that's where we're at tonight. As I
4 mentioned, this is our fourth of six meetings.
5 Based on the feedback that we get from you all, as
6 far as what will be included in the environmental
7 study, in March to April, Jenna will make a scoping
8 decision. So it would all be included and, again,
9 that incorporates your comments.

10 She will then do that study. It's a very
11 rigorous study. It will take several months, so
12 that draft would come out around September,
13 tentatively, of 2025. Then, we'll release the
14 draft, so that you all have several weeks, a month
15 or so maybe, to review that and look at it and react
16 to it, and that's when we come back here. I
17 mentioned that there would be an Administrative Law
18 Judge. So at that time, the Judge will take your
19 comments about the project: Did we study what you
20 thought we should study?

21 Then, after that, Jenna will also
22 incorporate those comments, and then issue a final
23 EIS, which is tentatively scheduled to be in
24 December of 2025. And later on in 2026 is when the
25 Commission is tentatively scheduled to make -- in

1 March of 2026 is, tentatively, going to make a final
2 decision on this project.

3 So I just want to thank you all, again,
4 very much for coming tonight. Your feedback really
5 does matter. It's important for the planning
6 process. So thank you for taking the time out of
7 your evening, and I'll hand it over to Mr. Weiers.

8 MR. JASON WEIERS: All right. Thanks,
9 Sam.

10 And thanks, everyone, for being here
11 tonight. As Sam mentioned, my name is Jason Weiers,
12 the manager of transmission project development at
13 Otter Tail Power Company, and tonight I'm here to
14 represent the applicants.

15 The applicants in this docket are Otter
16 Tail Power Company and Western Minnesota Municipal
17 Power Agency. Otter Tail and Western Minnesota will
18 co-own the Big Stone South to Alexandria project.
19 Through this proceeding, Western Minnesota is being
20 represented by Missouri River Energy Services.

21 The project that Otter Tail and Western
22 Minnesota are requesting a route permit for
23 involves, approximately, a hundred-mile,
24 345-kilovolt transmission line from Otter Tail's Big
25 Stone South substation just west of Big Stone City

1 in South Dakota to Western Minnesota's Alexandria
2 substation on the southwest side of the city of
3 Alexandria.

4 Similar to the transmission line you see
5 along Interstate-94, we're planning to construct
6 this line using double-circuit capable structures,
7 but initially we will only be installing one
8 circuit.

9 Along with the expansions at the endpoint
10 substations and the transmission line itself, we may
11 also install what we call a fiber-optic regeneration
12 station along the central section of the
13 transmission line. This fiber-optic regeneration
14 station is needed to amplify the communication
15 signals between the endpoint substations.

16 As I mentioned earlier, the transmission
17 structures that we plan to use for this project will
18 look similar to what you see along Interstate-94,
19 with the exception that we plan to use COR-TEN steel
20 rather than galvanized steel. So what this means is
21 that the structures will have more of a brown color
22 to them rather than a gray color.

23 We do expect that the typical structure
24 will be between 120 and 180 feet tall. The
25 structure will sit upon a concrete foundation,

1 between 7 feet and 14 feet in diameter. And that
2 concrete foundation may be anywhere between 25 and
3 80 feet deep, depending on the soil conditions.
4 Structures will be between 400 and 1,400 feet apart,
5 and that depends upon the approved route, along with
6 the geographic terrain for the route that is
7 approved.

8 Lastly, I'll mention that our typical
9 right-of-way for our 345-kilovolt transmission line
10 is 150 feet wide, and that is 75 feet on either side
11 of the centerline of the structure, so a total width
12 of 150 feet.

13 Sam talked earlier about the need for the
14 project, and that need was previously approved by
15 the Commission back in October of 2024. The need
16 was based on a study that was performed by the
17 Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO.

18 MISO is the regional transmission
19 organization that oversees the planning of the
20 transmission system in this region and identifies
21 future needs for transmission. In July of 2022,
22 MISO approved a portfolio of 18 new transmission
23 projects in the Midwest region. One of those is the
24 Big Stone South to Alexandria project, shown as
25 project number 2 on the map on the slide.

1 So the Commission previously approving
2 the need for the project, today's focus is a
3 discussion around the scope of the environmental
4 review related to the route permit application that
5 we filed with the Minnesota Commission on October
6 22nd of 2024.

7 Given that part of this project does
8 include some length in South Dakota, we also have
9 applied for a facility permit from the South Dakota
10 Public Utilities Commission. We have been going
11 through that process since April of 2024, and we
12 expect a decision from the South Dakota Public
13 Utilities Commission no later than April of this
14 year.

15 If you attended some of the previous open
16 houses in this area for the project, you may be
17 aware that we have undertaken a very extensive
18 effort over the course of the last 18 months with
19 four different rounds of open houses along the
20 proposed corridors for the project. And these open
21 houses were used to gather information that we
22 considered when we identified the proposed routes in
23 our permit application.

24 We started back in April of 2023 with our
25 first round of open houses, that included an outline

1 of a study area where we were considering to route
2 the transmission project. We gathered information
3 from landowners and other interested stakeholders
4 and came back for a second round of public meetings
5 in October of 2023 where we shared our proposed
6 project corridors.

7 In February of 2024, we had come back for
8 a third round of open houses, and we shared route
9 corridors with the public. We continued to gather
10 information, and, ultimately, in June of 2024, we
11 held our fourth round of public open houses, which
12 then included our proposed route options for
13 inclusion in the route permit application.

14 We did consider feedback extensively from
15 the landowners that have participated in these past
16 open houses, along with a lot of consultation with
17 the agencies, to come up with the proposed route
18 that you will find in our permit application.

19 Slide 17 has our proposed routes between
20 the border -- the South Dakota-Minnesota border and
21 the Alexandria substation. Generally speaking,
22 you'll notice two route options from the North
23 Dakota -- I'm sorry, from the Minnesota-South Dakota
24 border to the Alexandria substation.

25 As Sam mentioned earlier, we're generally

1 looking at a total distance between 91 miles and 105
2 miles in Minnesota, and that depends on the route
3 option that is selected through this process.

4 For ease in analyzing these route
5 options, we have broken these route options into
6 three different areas. There's a south area that
7 are shown in blue colors, a central area shown in
8 orange colors, and then a north area that's shown
9 with purple colors.

10 Although we'll only need 150 feet of
11 right-of-way for the new 345-kilovolt transmission
12 line, you'll notice in our application that we
13 generally included a route corridor width of 1,000
14 feet. And this gives us some flexibility to work
15 with landowners to identify the optimum location for
16 the centerline of the transmission line so we can
17 minimize impacts for landowners.

18 The south segments that are included in
19 our route permit application are anywhere between 39
20 and 42 miles in total length. And, again, these
21 start at the Minnesota-South Dakota border, and they
22 end in Tara Township in Swift County.

23 The central route segment options are
24 between 34 and 39 miles of length from Tara Township
25 in Swift County up to Ben Wade Township in Pope

1 County. And then, lastly, the north route segments
2 are between 18 and 25 miles from Ben Wade Township
3 up to the Alexandria substation in Douglas County.

4 If you are a landowner along the approved
5 route, this slide explains a general construction
6 overview of what you can expect on your property.
7 Once we have the land rights in place, we start with
8 surveying and staking the proposed structure
9 locations. Next, we will establish temporary access
10 roads to get to the right-of-way. The third step in
11 the process is installing the concrete foundations.

12 After the foundations are installed, we
13 will set the structures on the foundation. And
14 after the structures are set, we will string the
15 conductor generally with the use of a helicopter.
16 And then, lastly, we will restore that work area by
17 removing any temporary access roads and reseeding
18 disturbed areas of the construction in coordination
19 with the landowners.

20 Sam talked briefly about the permitting
21 process and the anticipated schedule. As we look at
22 the larger body schedule, considering that we'll
23 have the Minnesota permitting process hopefully
24 wrapped up in the second quarter of 2026, based on
25 that assumption, we look forward to additional land

1 rights outreach starting after we get the route
2 permit application decision from the Commission. We
3 will begin that acquisition process with landowners
4 to acquire the 150 feet of right-of-way that we need
5 for the project.

6 After the land rights are secured, we
7 will perform field surveys to help support our
8 efforts to obtain other federal, state, and local
9 permits. We expect the acquisition of those
10 additional permits to take approximately two years,
11 which will get us into the early part of 2028.

12 Assuming we have all those permits in
13 place, we anticipate we'll start construction in the
14 spring of 2028 and wrap up construction by the end
15 of 2030. This is our best estimate of the schedule
16 at this time, but it is subject to change based on a
17 number of factors such as material lead times,
18 contractor availability, and weather conditions.

19 If you have further questions or would
20 like additional information following this meeting,
21 you're always welcome to contact me by phone or
22 email. My contact information is shown here on
23 slide 23. Alternatively, you are always welcome to
24 visit our project website and leave us comments,
25 send us an email, or leave us a voicemail on our

1 toll-free number. We do have members of our project
2 team monitoring each one of these media channels
3 each day, and we do our best to respond to comments
4 within 24 to 48 hours with that.

5 I'll turn it over to Jenna for the next
6 presentation.

7 MS. JENNA NESS: Hi. I'm Jenna with the
8 Department of Commerce. I am the environmental
9 review manager for this project. That means I'm
10 managing the EIS, the environmental impact
11 statement. I appreciate your time coming here
12 tonight. I'll briefly go over the Department of
13 Commerce's role in the environmental review and what
14 creating that EIS looks like. We'll talk about all
15 the different ways you can comment, and then we'll
16 get into the oral public comment part of the meeting
17 and you'll be able to ask questions as well.

18 So the Department of Commerce conducts
19 the environmental review for the Commission, and
20 they offer objective analysis of the project, which
21 means that we are making a fact-based document and
22 offering information for the project and its impacts
23 for the public and other parties. And that can be
24 used for informed decision-making, which essentially
25 is any governmental unit or another party that will

1 be issuing things about the permit.

2 The main things we do in this document is
3 evaluate the potential human health and
4 environmental impacts of the project, and
5 identifying ways to potentially avoid or mitigate
6 those impacts.

7 So today we're at the scoping part of
8 this process, and the scope of the EIS is,
9 essentially, the table of contents. If you grabbed
10 a copy of the draft scope on the way in, it looks
11 like this (indicating). That is our proposed layout
12 of the EIS.

13 So the EIS needs to be focused on the
14 most relevant information needed to make those
15 informed decisions, and that's part of this process
16 in getting public comment to make sure we're
17 including everything in the EIS that we need to.

18 So another thing that is included in this
19 public process is alternate routes that can be
20 suggested tonight and -- or in public comment as
21 well. And if you'd like to suggest an alternative
22 route, it will need to mitigate a potential impact.
23 That impact can be a range of things, including
24 something as simple as a disturbance to your
25 viewshed.

1 It must also be specific and
2 identifiable, and all I mean by that is I need to
3 know the area that needs to be studied. So if you
4 can draw it on a map, I can do a good job looking at
5 the impacts of that area.

6 So there's several ways to comment. The
7 oral comments that will be coming up soon in the
8 meeting, we have a court reporter with us tonight,
9 so those will be a part of the record. You can also
10 complete the comment sheets that you may have seen
11 on your way in. They look like this (indicating).
12 You can hand them into me tonight, or you can send
13 them in in the postal mail. My address is on the
14 back there.

15 You can also email me directly, and my
16 email is on the PowerPoint presentation. Or you can
17 go online to this link, and there will be a "submit
18 a comment" button. And just a reminder that the
19 comment period ends January 31st, the end of this
20 month.

21 Okay. So moving into the oral public
22 comments, we need to go over some rules. We need
23 one speaker at a time so our court reporter can
24 accurately document what you're saying. We also
25 need you to state and spell your name for the

1 record, your first and last name for the court
2 reporter.

3 And I think we have a good-sized turnout,
4 so we generally ask to limit your comments to a few
5 minutes, but we can always come back around, and you
6 can come up as many times as you would like.

7 And it's most helpful if you can direct
8 your comments at the scope of the environmental
9 impact statement, but we're also answering questions
10 tonight if you would like to directly ask us
11 anything.

12 So with that, I'm just going to put this
13 reminder slide up about what the scope of the EIS
14 means. We're looking for comments on any human and
15 environmental impacts we may have missed, strategies
16 to mitigate those, and, of course, alternatives to
17 the proposed route that mitigate impacts as well.
18 Thank you.

19 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, Jenna.

20 So that's our presentation. We want to
21 open up the rest of the night for folks to speak.
22 When I last checked right before I came up here, I
23 didn't see that anybody signed up to speak. Which
24 is just fine, we can -- we'll still give you all an
25 opportunity.

1 Is there anybody who would either like to
2 make a comment or ask a question?

3 Yes, sir. If you could come up, or we
4 could bring the microphone to you. Whatever is
5 easiest.

6 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: That would be
7 easier.

8 MR. SAM LOBBY: Okay. Thanks, Christy.

9 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: My name is George
10 Duckwitz, D as in David, U-C-K-W-I-T-Z. I'm a
11 resident of Fairfield Township in western Swift
12 County, and I live south of your proposed route
13 number 2 on -- right along County Road 22.

14 Please pardon me, four months ago I
15 suffered a very acute stroke. I've pretty much got
16 control of my speech, but if my speech gets out of
17 control or you don't understand me, please let me
18 know and I'll try to slow down a little bit. And
19 also, too, I cannot control my -- I would say called
20 (inaudible), but I'll try my best.

21 A little background about myself: Many,
22 many years ago, probably about close to 45, I
23 received a bachelor of arts degree from the
24 University of Minnesota, majored in biology,
25 geology, and chemistry. I also earned a master's of

1 science in geology from Oklahoma State University.

2 My comments tonight are regarding the
3 proposed route number 2 on -- along County
4 Road/Highway 22. One thing that I'm having a hard
5 problem with this here is: I don't trust you all.
6 And four times in my lifetime I've been involved in
7 situations similar to this where a proposed project
8 was ran through, and the end result devastated the
9 area that they put the proposed project in.

10 And we've seen private sectors with a lot
11 of money pushed in, and we have people like the
12 Public Utilities Commission and Department of
13 Commerce sitting there, and then they -- I'll say
14 that they were bought off, that's just my opinion.

15 I'll give you an example. About 1980s,
16 we -- well, back in the 1960s, I lived along the
17 Pomme de Terre River, and I remember as a kid
18 catching the fish, watch the walleye, the northern
19 pike, grab the fish out of the clear water. And
20 river systems had a -- have a pool and the rapid
21 areas, and the rapid area was full of chunks of
22 gravel. In the summer days, the gravel sparkled
23 like gold.

24 Then, we started seeing the water quality
25 deteriorate. So we went to our local units of

1 government, Swift County commissioners for this area
2 here, and they have -- they got in coordination with
3 the other six -- other five counties with
4 geopolitical boundaries that lie within the Pomme de
5 Terre watershed and formed the Pomme de Terre River
6 Association. And we thought we had something that
7 was really helpful there, and then Doug Rasmussen
8 was appointed chairman of that commission. And
9 after about four years, he announced his retirement.

10 And he says, I apologize to you people
11 along the river. The purpose of this association
12 was to set you people up in the watershed district.
13 We found out there was -- a lot of money came from,
14 not only the landowners, whose mentality was, once
15 the water is off my land, it's not my problem
16 anymore, to bankers, tile companies, seed companies,
17 implement companies to prevent drainage of the
18 waters of the wetland.

19 So, anyway, what's basically happened now
20 is the Pomme de Terre River is now the fifth most
21 polluted river in the state of Minnesota. And,
22 ironically, the people that did not want us to do
23 anything to maintain the quality of that water,
24 their grandchildren are swimming in the river and
25 they're wondering why their grandkids are getting

1 sick.

2 The second thing is, in the report that
3 you all submitted, it talks about wind turbines and
4 those types of energy. This company called Apex, I
5 learned, is -- wants to build wind turbines in
6 western Swift County, and they want to throw in
7 \$30 million to Swift County and a million dollars to
8 each township to allow them to build wind turbines
9 in -- in the area.

10 For the few of us in this room that are
11 Christians know that it's written in the bible in
12 the book of Proverbs, Chapter 29, Verse 4 is where
13 it basically said: The king established the lands,
14 and the one that accepts a bribe destroys it.

15 And those of you that remember the story
16 of the Trojan Horse, how the Greeks made the Trojan
17 Horse because they could not break the walls of the
18 city of Troy down, and the Trojan Priest Laocoöm,
19 L-A-0-C-0-0-M, said I fear the Greeks when they bear
20 gifts. So, anyway, that's kind of the background
21 why I don't trust you all.

22 So what I wanted to talk about is in that
23 report for the certificate of need for the Big Stone
24 South to Alexandria, you list how much carbon
25 emissions this project will be reducing. I'd like

1 to know what values were you using to arrive at the
2 reduction of 399 metric tons, which is listed in
3 chapter four of that report. How did you come up
4 with those -- how did you come up with that number?

5 MS. JENNA NESS: Are you talking about
6 the numbers in the application?

7 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: In that Big Stone
8 to Alexandria transmission report that was filed.
9 It was listed in chapter four.

10 MR. SAM LOBBY: I don't want to sound
11 evasive, but I don't know the answer to that because
12 that's part of a previous project. So I don't
13 have -- I don't have that information in front of
14 me. I apologize.

15 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: Well, the reason
16 why I ask that question is I looked at the records
17 listed in that report, and in the last report that
18 came out, the state of Minnesota lost over 100,000
19 acres of farm/cropland due to urban sprawl,
20 transmission poles, wind farms, solar farms were all
21 included in that.

22 In that report it lists that
23 approximately 1,700 acres of agricultural land is
24 going to be taken out of production for this project
25 to go through, of which 900 and some acres is

1 considered private farmland. What this is doing is
2 forcing us farmers to find additional land to farm.
3 So what we're doing is we're tearing out fence
4 lines, that are -- are known carbon sequesters.
5 We're tearing out abandoned build sites. We're
6 tearing down the trees, which is also known as
7 carbon sequesters, and turning it into cropland,
8 which is now a carbon emitter.

9 One of the things that I was surprised to
10 learn in the report was that there -- when I wrote
11 my master's thesis, I referenced a model by
12 Dr. Robert Cleary, C-L-E-E-R-Y [sic], a geoscientist
13 from the University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil;
14 and a civil engineer at Princeton University.

15 And I had a chance to have a face-to-face
16 meeting with him. And if you don't remember back in
17 the '70s and early '80s, there was such an unknown
18 horror about deforestation of the Brazilian tropical
19 rainforests. And then, of course, my
20 conversation -- even though the model that I used of
21 his was not associated with climate models, I did --
22 my face-to-face meeting, I asked him some questions
23 about that.

24 And he replied back, he said, where you
25 live is the Prairie Pothole Region, your people are

1 essentially draining the wetlands. The data clearly
2 shows it. Your people's activities have a greater
3 impact on climate change than my -- than Brazilian
4 people cutting down a few trees. And I think
5 there's a lot of truth to that statement after years
6 of seeing it.

7 And also, too, you did not reference any
8 of Dr. Don Reicosky, R-E-I-C-O-S-K-Y, a researcher
9 from the US Department of Agriculture, North Central
10 Research Lab, and agricultural researcher
11 (indiscernible) on Morris, Minnesota. He did
12 extensive research on how much carbon -- us farmers
13 in different tillage practices and different
14 conservation practices, how much carbon has been
15 released or sequestered.

16 And none of your research stated
17 reference to any of his work that he's done on what
18 carbon methods we farmers can reduce, and projects
19 like this will enhance us to emit more carbon into
20 the atmosphere instead of sequester it.

21 So I was wondering, do you propose to
22 include these values in your matrix when you
23 calculate how many tons of carbon is being mitigated
24 by this proposed project?

25 MS. JENNA NESS: I might have to ask a

1 few questions back and forth to make sure I
2 understand. I think you referenced the study out of
3 the U of M, Morris; is that correct?

4 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: No, it's the US
5 Farm and Agriculture, Agricultural Researchers,
6 North Central Soils Lab out of Morris, Minnesota.

7 MS. JENNA NESS: Okay. So now that's in
8 the record, I will definitely be able to reference
9 it and see what kind of values they're using. I
10 mean, if they're within the state of Minnesota,
11 that's definitely a study I would want to look at.

12 We do verify greenhouse gas calculations.
13 They provided some in the application, and I --
14 could you restate your question about carbon
15 sequestration with the crops?

16 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: When we do
17 different tillage practices, we release carbon into
18 the atmosphere. It's also carbon crops, CRB, three
19 claims that are known carbon sequesters that take
20 the carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and put it
21 into the ground.

22 MS. JENNA NESS: Okay. So are you asking
23 us to include that in the calculation for the
24 farmland that is removed because of the project?

25 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: The farmland that

1 we farmers have to find to replace the land that's
2 been removed by the project.

3 MS. JENNA NESS: Okay. Yeah, I'll have
4 to talk with my team about that. I know a lot of
5 times people can still farm within the right-of-way.
6 So we'd have to find a way to calculate how much
7 room that is and do the math, but it's certainly
8 something we'll look into.

9 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: It's very important
10 to look into, because I think from the data that I
11 looked at in Reicosky's reports that I just skimmed
12 over and looked at, one calculation was that 399
13 metric tons that's referenced in that report will
14 probably be negated. So then there's no benefit to
15 carbon sequestration by building this power line.

16 MS. JENNA NESS: Okay. We'll look into
17 that. I'm glad you were so specific about which one
18 it was so I can look back at the record and make
19 sure it's incorporated in the EIS.

20 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: All right. Thank
21 you. I've got a couple more comments to make, if I
22 may.

23 MR. SAM LOBBY: Just real quick, is there
24 any other folks that would like to speak? We just
25 want to make sure everyone has an opportunity. Are

1 there any other folks that are interested in
2 speaking? And if you are, we can also wait until
3 after.

4 It doesn't look like it.

5 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: Okay. The next
6 thing that comes up, one thing I didn't mention that
7 was when I went to school to get degrees in geology
8 and did work in the mineral industry, my main love
9 was farming. And -- but I want to come back to --
10 so what I'm getting at there was, besides farming, I
11 also worked as a crop insurance adjuster and
12 maintained the records for the compliance department
13 of that.

14 In the course of my work there, I had an
15 interesting conversation with a couple farmers who
16 farm land that the -- that these transmission towers
17 that you're proposing to build, the shadow that is
18 cast onto the ground, they noticed on their combine
19 yield markers that the yield of their crop was
20 slightly less than with crop in the areas that is
21 not shadowed. And I didn't find any research on
22 that part either to establish that these wind --
23 these transmission towers now -- laid over on the
24 crop, that may actually be reducing the yield, but
25 that's the conversations I had with some these

1 farmers. They maintain their load with their
2 combine yield markers, a reduced yield.

3 And a couple of them -- a few of them
4 also said they had -- the land alongside the wind
5 turbines, they also noticed reduced yields --
6 slightly reduced yields. So -- and I'm not aware of
7 any study that has researched that yet or not.
8 That's something else you might want to consider,
9 too.

10 MS. JENNA NESS: Okay. Thank you.

11 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: The last thing is
12 along the Pomme de Terre River, along your route
13 number 2, you got -- there's a tributary called Dry
14 Wood Creek -- that is a confluence with the Pomme de
15 Terre River -- is two miles north of this
16 transmission line. A half-mile south is the
17 confluence of a waterway, which is -- drains from
18 the east, and mile and a half south is the Lake
19 Oliver confluence that drains to the west. This
20 land area of these three small tributaries is about
21 the size of Minneapolis-St. Paul.

22 Before you -- before we had 911, the way
23 people -- a lot of people used to navigate,
24 especially the Native Americans, was -- where these
25 tributaries were, they would follow them. And in

1 Fairfield Township, we have several Native American
2 sites. One thing that was not mentioned in your
3 report was the history of Swift County that lists
4 the locations of some of the Indian burial mounds
5 and campsites on it.

6 Now, the University of Minnesota, Morris,
7 campus started out as an Indian boarding school, and
8 right now the Native Americans are worried that
9 maybe some of the Native children there might
10 have been -- that die were buried in unmarked
11 graves.

12 Swift County did not include all the
13 burial sites. When the University of Minnesota was
14 established, a professor named Bruce Nord wanted to
15 examine these burial sites and also the encampments
16 that the Native Americans had along the Pomme de
17 Terre River that were not documented yet in the
18 history of Swift County, but the Native Americans
19 would not grant permission to him.

20 So that's -- I did not see anything that
21 you had contact with the tribal people about
22 disturbing any of these Native American sites that
23 are located in Fairfield Township along the Pomme de
24 Terre River.

25 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thanks, Mr. Duckwitz,

1 for your comment there. I will mention that we have
2 done our best in the application to include a review
3 of cultural resources from publicly-available
4 sources by performing a desktop review of what
5 available information is out there.

6 I will also mention that before we start
7 construction, we will be performing additional
8 surveys along the approved route to identify the
9 presence of any Native American artifacts.

10 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: See, like my dad, a
11 few years ago found an oblong stone. I was going to
12 bring it along with me tonight, but I decided it was
13 too much to lug around. What's interesting is that
14 stone, where that stone -- that piece of granite, it
15 came from the Native Falls, St. Croix River area.
16 So how did that get from out there to over here in
17 Fairfield Township? That's the things that Mr. Nord
18 wanted to research and document, but the Native
19 Americans did not give him permission to do so.

20 So another -- and then the other thing
21 is, there's another gentleman, his name is Charlie
22 Hanson, he passed away years ago, but in my
23 conversations with him, the same thing. He
24 identified a lot of these sites along Artichoke Lake
25 where you're running this power through. That's all

1 I'm referring to is that Mr. Hanson has said the
2 same thing also, too, in that area.

3 I'm not aware about any sites along
4 Highway 12, the southern route that you want to do,
5 but I know along the -- in Fairfield Township,
6 running through there, if you counted that, and then
7 further west over by Artichoke Lake.

8 MR. SAM LOBBY: Just one comment on that
9 as far as route permits. For all route permits,
10 there are conditions in the permit about if cultural
11 resources are discovered, and that's going to be
12 taken into account. And if anything is discovered,
13 it's not like construction just blazes right through
14 it.

15 MS. JENNA NESS: I would also want to
16 mention that we require applicants to contact every
17 single tribe in the state of Minnesota before they
18 submit their application and include proof of that
19 in the application.

20 And as soon as the Department of Commerce
21 gets an application, we reach out to all the tribal
22 historic preservation offices. So they are aware of
23 the project, and they at least get the heads-up and
24 can start looking into the area for any resources
25 they know of that, like you said, aren't documented

1 in normal venues.

2 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: I do have two more
3 things, if I may.

4 MR. SAM LOBBY: Just real quick, are
5 there any other folks that are interested speaking?

6 I'm sorry. We need the court reporter to
7 be able to hear you.

8 We can come back to you, Mr. Duckwitz, if
9 that works.

10 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: That's fine.

11 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir.

12 Sir, if you could please state and spell
13 your name for the record.

14 MR. ALLEN MURN: Yeah, Allen Murn
15 (phonetic).

16 It shows a picture of the high-line right
17 along the road, that's 94 up there. Why do they
18 have to go out in the field here? They're right
19 along that, all the way up to Moorhead there. Why
20 do you have to put it out in the middle of the field
21 here?

22 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thanks for your
23 comment. We have looked at the possibility of
24 following existing infrastructures, such as existing
25 roadways. And in areas where there's opportunities

1 to parallel existing roads, we will work with
2 landowners and the proper road authorities to
3 determine the appropriate location of the
4 structures.

5 MR. ALLEN MURN: You can't hardly
6 work/spray behind them or anything.

7 MR. JASON WEIERS: Sure. In past
8 applications or past projects, I will mention that
9 we have hugged the structures approximately 20 feet
10 from the edge of road right-of-way. So
11 ultimately -- I mean, in those situations, we may
12 not need the full 150 feet of right-of-way. We
13 could get by with 20 feet on the one side of the
14 structure and 75 feet on the other side of the
15 structure. So in that case, 95 feet of easement
16 would be possible when we can parallel existing
17 roads.

18 MR. ALLEN MURN: I was just wondering
19 because I go up there quite a bit and the poles are
20 just right on the edge, and that makes it better for
21 the farmers.

22 MR. JASON WEIERS: And, certainly, we'll
23 coordinate with the landowners as best we can and
24 work with the appropriate road authorities.

25 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank, sir, for your

1 question.

2 Before we turn it back to Mr. Duckwitz,
3 are there any other folks that are interested in
4 speaking?

5 MR. KIRBY MARQUART: Kirby Marquart, Tara
6 Township. M-A-R-Q-U-A-R-T.

7 You have it on here, and I -- now I've
8 lost it. You have a -- what is it? A regeneration
9 site. We were wondering -- I was kind of wondering
10 where you're possibly going to put that. You know,
11 is that going to be a couple acres, or could you
12 explain more about what that could possibly be?

13 MR. JASON WEIERS: Certainly. Thanks for
14 your question, Mr. Marquart. We don't have an exact
15 location for the fiber-optic regeneration station at
16 this time. Ideally, we'd like to place it as close
17 to the middle of the line as we can, but without
18 knowing the specific route at this point, we don't
19 have a specific location for the fiber-optic
20 regeneration station.

21 What I will mention is that our goal was
22 to place that regeneration station within the
23 permitted corridor that's been identified as part of
24 the permit application, so somewhere within that
25 thousand-foot corridor.

1 The fiber-optic regeneration station will
2 look similar to a substation to the general public.
3 The anticipated space would probably be somewhere in
4 the footprint of about a hundred feet wide by a
5 hundred feet long, and that would be completely
6 surrounded with a fence.

7 And then there will also be a small
8 shelter building in that fenced area that houses the
9 communication equipment needed to handle the live
10 signal between the two endpoint substations. That
11 small shelter is anticipated to be about 15 feet
12 wide, 20 feet -- 25 feet long, and about 15 feet
13 tall.

14 MR. SAM LOBBY: All righty. Did you have
15 more follow-up questions or anything?

16 MR. KIRBY MARQUART: (Shakes head.)

17 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. Is there any
18 other folks before we turn it back to Mr. Duckwitz?

19 And just a real quick reminder, too, I'll
20 just put it up here. If you don't want to speak
21 publicly, too -- or even if you do want to speak
22 publicly -- you can always also offer written
23 comments, which need to be in by January 31st, and
24 here's some information on that.

25 So if there's no one else, I will just

1 return the microphone to Mr. Duckwitz. Thank you.

2 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: Thank you.

3 As you know, the Native Americans regard
4 the bald eagle as a sacred, powerful bird. I was
5 always wondering why these bald eagles made their
6 nest on my land, a mile and a half south of this
7 transmission site.

8 And given what I told you earlier about
9 the burial mounds and campsites and stuff they've
10 got, this nest is right smack dab in the middle of a
11 two-mile radius of this area I was talking about
12 located in Fairfield Township where you want to run
13 this line through.

14 You referenced the Bald Eagle and Golden
15 Eagle Protection Act in your report. And it states
16 that the penalties for killing or disturbing, likely
17 to cause an injury, to the bald eagle for
18 individuals is \$100,000 and one year in prison. For
19 an organization, the fine is double.

20 Many of us farmers in this area are our
21 own organization, such as a corporation, an LLC,
22 partnership, trust, et cetera. If any of our
23 harvesting or tillage equipment would accidentally
24 kill a bald eagle, we're looking double that fine.

25 Whereas, the entities that are owning

1 this transmission line, that are known to kill and
2 disturb bald eagles, are most likely to be exempt
3 from penalties because they put some things on the
4 wire or try some mitigation methods to prevent the
5 bird kills, migratory birds.

6 This report referenced the Fish and
7 Wildlife, that work within 660 feet of the nest is
8 okay, and I did not find that 660 feet in that
9 report when I read through it. But I was surprised
10 to learn that the report did not mention the 2024
11 Eagle Rule for your mitigations on bird kills and
12 stuff.

13 Just so you should know, that there's
14 been several times in the spring of the year I've
15 seen as many as nine bald eagles on my farm,
16 immature to mature adult. The nest that's on my
17 farm, some years have one eaglet, some years have
18 two eaglets, so it makes it a total of four eaglets.
19 You have a different set of permitting processes to
20 go through for -- regarding the 2024 Rule. Hope
21 you're aware of that.

22 The other thing, too, that I was
23 surprised, we talked about avian mitigation that was
24 referenced in that report, you did not reference it,
25 a report by Dr. Scott Loss from the Oklahoma City

1 University and Dr. Peter Marra, M-A-R-R-A. Loss is
2 L-O-S-S. And it was a research paper published in
3 2014. You used a research paper published in '26
4 [sic] about bird kills mitigation. So your report
5 is using outdated information that was -- that I'm
6 referencing. It appears that the remediation
7 measures are not reflected -- and this is bird
8 kills.

9 The other thing besides the bald eagles
10 coming through on my farm, I have witnessed several
11 times Trumpeter Swans coming through. And they're
12 part of somebody's research project because they
13 either have an orange collar with a number on their
14 neck or a black collar with a number on their neck,
15 the Trumpeter Swans that are coming through along
16 the Pomme de Terre River in Fairfield Township.

17 And then, also, the report mentions, you
18 know, that some of remediation measures reduces bird
19 kills. There are enough birds killed by domestic
20 animals and buildings, why do we need to kill more?

21 The point I'm getting at is it looks like
22 we've got a two-tiered type of justice system here,
23 where it's guys like you from Otter Tail Power, you
24 don't have to face the same penalties as we
25 residents who live out there. So -- and you don't

1 live out there, but we do.

2 So how can we get away from the
3 two-tiered justice system with regard to bird kills
4 from what we do out there? That's something you
5 need to consider in your final assessment report so
6 we don't have a two-tiered justice system.

7 You know, basically, in summary, it
8 appears that my fears of you destroying what we
9 have, the way the county commissioners did by
10 accepting bribes to the Pomme de Terre River
11 Association, and then also, too, what I'm seeing on
12 the wind turbine farms, like the Grand Meadow
13 incident, where if you get rid of the turbine
14 blades, landfills are rejecting wind turbine blades.
15 I don't know, the wind farm is coming right behind
16 this transmission line over here you guys are
17 putting in, there's a number of easements
18 developing. And I, too, have been approached to --
19 if I want to consider getting an easement to put a
20 wind turbine up on my farm, and I turned them down.

21 It's kind of a joke. You know, last year
22 when the legislature had the state seal redesigned,
23 the individual that was barefoot and walking behind
24 a walk plan should be changed to transmission lines,
25 wind turbines, and solar panels. And the Indian

1 riding off on a horse in a sunset should be joined
2 by a farmer in four-wheel drive tractor and bald
3 eagles flying off into the sunset. It's
4 absolutely --

5 MS. JENNA NESS: We're getting off the
6 scope of the meeting today. So if you could please
7 stay on the scope of the environmental impact
8 statement or ask questions about the project, I'd
9 appreciate it.

10 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: So, in summary, I'd
11 like you to consider other types of green energy,
12 such as fuel cells that use ethanol, and employ them
13 while you have time to meet the 2022 legislative
14 mandate before you have created a large, more costly
15 ecological disaster than what we currently are
16 dealing with, as I mentioned earlier. Share equally
17 the liability regarding the penalties for killing
18 eagles. And also include in your research how much
19 additional carbon are you forcing us farmers to emit
20 in your calculation of carbon reduction? Respect
21 the Native cultural sites, respect our community by
22 not destroying --

23 COURT REPORTER: Can you please slow
24 down?

25 MR. GEORGE DUCKWITZ: Okay. Sorry about

1 that.

2 Now is a good time to pause and consider
3 other types of green energy, such as fuel cells that
4 use ethanol, and employ them while you have time to
5 meet the 2022 legislative mandate of 100 percent
6 carbon-free electricity generation before you have
7 to create a large, more costly ecological disaster
8 than what we currently are dealing with, as
9 mentioned earlier.

10 Share equally in the liability regarding
11 the penalty for killing eagles. Also, include how
12 much carbon you are forcing us farmers to emit in
13 your calculation of carbon reduction. Respect the
14 Native cultural sites. Respect our community by not
15 destroying by false money, erecting (indiscernible),
16 pit neighbor against neighbor. Remember, the one
17 who accepts the bribe destroys the land, and beware
18 of the companies bearing gifts.

19 That's all I have. Thank you.

20 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you for your
21 comments.

22 All right. We'll open it back up. Are
23 there any other folks that would like to make
24 comments or ask questions? And, again, if you don't
25 feel like speaking publicly, that is just fine.

1 Written comments are accepted through January 31st,
2 and the information is up there. You can grab a
3 comment sheet on the way out, if you didn't already.
4 There's a place where you can write in your comments
5 and then put a stamp on it. You can go to the
6 website listed, or mail, fax, or email a comment to
7 Jenna.

8 I'll ask one more time if there's any
9 folks interested in commenting. If not, we'll
10 conclude the meeting, and folks can stick around and
11 ask a few more questions informally if you're
12 interested. Any other folks want to speak tonight?

13 All right. It doesn't look like we have
14 anybody else who wants to speak. So I just want to
15 thank you all once again for coming out and being
16 here tonight. Your feedback is very much
17 appreciated. And if you have any questions later
18 on, you can always reach out to us.

19 Have a great night, everybody, and a safe
20 drive home. Thank you.

21 (Public comment concluded.)
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23
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25

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SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 23-160

HANCOCK - JANUARY 15, 2025 - 11:00 A.M.

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Application for a Route Permit for
the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345-kV Transmission
Project in West-Central Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. E017,ET10/TL-23-160

Hancock City Hall
662 6th Street
Hancock, Minnesota

January 15, 2025

STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Janet Shaddix Elling, RPR

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1 MR. SAM LOBBY: Good morning, folks.

2 My name is Sam Lobby, I'm with the
3 Minnesota Public Utilities Commission.

4 We have a full house today. We really
5 appreciate all of you coming out today. Your
6 comments and feedback are really useful for this
7 project.

8 And as far as we'll talk a little bit
9 more today about what the state's role is. A big
10 part of that is getting feedback from you all on
11 this project, including route alternatives and
12 things like that, so your participation is greatly
13 valued and that makes a really big difference once
14 an actual permit decision is made further down the
15 line, and we'll get into that.

16 So today we are here to talk about the
17 public information and environmental review scoping
18 meeting for the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345
19 kilovolt Transmission Project. If you're looking it
20 up online, it is docket 23-160.

21 So just to give you an idea of what we're
22 going to be covering here. We're going to buzz
23 through our presentation and then open it up for
24 comments.

25 First, I'm Sam again, and I'm with the

1 Public Utilities Commission, and I'm going to talk
2 about the permit application review process.

3 Next, Jenna with -- excuse me.

4 Jason Weiers with Otter Tail Power will
5 talk about the project itself.

6 Then next, Jenna with the Department of
7 Commerce will talk about the environmental study
8 that's going to be done. And so that study is a big
9 part of what we want to get your feedback on today,
10 on what we should be studying, and then we'll open
11 it up for questions and comments.

12 So this is just my information. If
13 you're here today, you're at the very beginning of
14 the process, so you're coming at the right time to
15 offer your comments so we can look at things and
16 study things. But with that said, our comment
17 period goes until January 31st, but after that, even
18 if it's outside of a formal comment period, you can
19 always reach out to me with questions and so you've
20 got my information, my phone number and email, so
21 feel free to give me a call.

22 So the purpose of today's meeting is to
23 provide information about the project itself as well
24 as to provide information about the state's high
25 voltage transmission line route permitting process.

1 We want to today provide an opportunity for the
2 public to participate in developing the scope of the
3 environmental impact statement.

4 So the environmental impact statement, or
5 EIS, is kind of the jargon term for the study that
6 we're going to be doing. So what we're looking for
7 from you are comments on potential impacts of the
8 proposed project as well as comments on how to --
9 and methods of how to minimize, mitigate, or avoid
10 potential impacts, and that can include proposing
11 alternative routes or route segments for
12 consideration.

13 I've already provided my contact
14 information, but will provide everybody's again in
15 case you have questions or comments later.

16 So a little bit of background context on
17 this. There's three main government units that
18 oversee this process.

19 The first is the Minnesota Public
20 Utilities Commission who I work for. We're the
21 government unit that reviews applications and we
22 issue both site and route permits in Minnesota.

23 Next is the Department of Commerce. They
24 manage the environmental review process for the
25 Commission and they prepare the environmental impact

1 statement for the study on the proposed project.

2 They're not here today, but later in the
3 process we'll have an administrative law judge from
4 the Office of Administrative Hearings who will
5 facilitate a public hearing later on in the process,
6 and then they will provide a report on the legal
7 findings, the findings of fact, the conclusions of
8 law, and recommendations on the proposed project.
9 And so that they will be taking all of your comments
10 and reviewing those and incorporating that into a
11 formal report, so just to give you kind of a sense
12 of what that's all about with the judge.

13 Today is the first meeting. We haven't
14 done the study yet, so we want to get your feedback
15 on what we should study. And then around September,
16 and I'll go over a timeline in a minute, but in the
17 September to October time period we'll come back to
18 this same place, the same type of meeting, except
19 the judge will be running it and at that point we
20 will have a draft of the environmental study, so
21 that gives you time to react to it and then look at
22 it and let us know did we study what you wanted us
23 to study. I'll talk a little bit more about that in
24 a minute.

25 So the Minnesota Public Utilities

1 Commission consists of five commissioners that are
2 appointed by the governor and confirmed by the
3 Senate. We regulate three service industries,
4 electricity, natural gas, and telephone. Our
5 mission is to ensure safe, adequate, and efficient
6 utility services at fair and reasonable rates. And
7 we provide independent professional oversight in the
8 regulation of the utility service providers in a
9 manner that is consistent with the public interest.
10 So today the Public Utilities Commission and
11 Commerce, we're not for or against the project, we
12 just want your feedback on what to study and then
13 later on in the process your comments can help
14 inform the Commission's decision-making process.

15 So there's some project requirements in
16 order for this to go through. The Big Stone South
17 to Alexandria transmission line, in order for it to
18 be constructed, the Commission needs to issue a
19 route permit. And this case is going through the
20 full process, so the full process is the most
21 rigorous review process there is, and that's
22 required for any high voltage transmission line
23 operating at a nominal voltage of 200 kilovolts or
24 more and greater than 30 miles in length.

25 I talked with some folks here who it

1 sounds like you've been in these processes before so
2 you might be familiar with this. You maybe have
3 seen a different process before where a route permit
4 and a certificate of need were associated together
5 and both were done at the same time. For this
6 process, we're just doing the route permit. The
7 certificate of need was already granted by the state
8 back in October of 2024, and that was for the larger
9 Big Stone South to Alexandria to Big Oaks
10 Transmission Project that's under docket number
11 22-538. So you may have come to some of those
12 meetings as well. That was the bigger part of it,
13 and so today is just about the route permit, so the
14 certificate of need has already been granted.

15 I won't get too deep into this part of it
16 because Mr. Weiers with the company will tell you
17 more about the project, but the quick overview is
18 that the Applicants are proposing to build a new
19 approximately 91- to 105-mile 345 kilovolt
20 double-circuit-capable transmission line, and only
21 one circuit will be installed initially. The
22 proposed 345 kV line will run from the Big Stone
23 South Substation near the Minnesota-South Dakota
24 border to the existing Alexandria Substation near
25 Alexandria, Minnesota.

1 This transmission project is needed to
2 address regional reliability issues on the existing
3 230 kilovolt system in western and central
4 Minnesota.

5 So just to give you kind of a sense of
6 what to expect here moving forward. As I mentioned,
7 you're at the beginning of the process so there's a
8 a long time left, there's going to be many other
9 opportunities for you all to comment and nothing at
10 this point is set in stone. So if you're here today
11 to offer your comments, you're here at the right
12 time, you're getting involved at the right time and
13 we really appreciate your participation.

14 So the application was originally
15 submitted in October of 2024 and it was accepted in
16 December. The third line down there, the public
17 information meetings, that's what we're doing here
18 today. So yesterday we held two meetings, one in
19 Alexandria and one in Glenwood. Today we've got
20 this one this morning here in Hancock and later
21 we've got one this evening in Benson. Tomorrow then
22 we have one in Ortonville and then we have a virtual
23 meeting. All of those are going to be the same
24 thing, so if you go to one you got all the
25 information.

1 You're more than welcome to come to
2 multiple meetings, including the virtual meeting, so
3 if you think of something later on, you can come and
4 speak publicly, which we're going to give you an
5 opportunity to do here, too, although a lot of folks
6 don't like to do that or speak publicly. Or even if
7 you think of something later, there is that comment
8 period, the written comment period that goes through
9 January 31st, and Jenna will talk a little bit more
10 about that.

11 So the public information meetings, those
12 will be done tomorrow and then we will take all that
13 feedback and Jenna will incorporate that into the
14 EIS scoping decision, so what ultimately what is
15 going to get studied from March or April. And this
16 is a very rigorous study, it will take several
17 months to do, so the draft of that will come out in
18 September, roughly, tentatively for now.

19 And so once that draft comes out, we'll
20 post that online and then you'll have several weeks
21 to review that, to look at it, did we incorporate
22 the things that you were wanting us to study, are
23 there other things that you think should be studied,
24 and then that's when we will come back in September,
25 October for the public hearings with the

1 administrative law judge. So that's the opportunity
2 where you tell us did we study what you thought we
3 should have.

4 Then based on the feedback that Jenna
5 gets from that meeting, she will then issue a Final
6 EIS, which would come out in December of 2025,
7 tentatively. And then the final Commission meeting
8 is tentatively scheduled for March of 2026, so quite
9 a ways off. There's nothing -- again, nothing is
10 set in stone at this point, we want to get your
11 comments and feedback, and there's plenty of
12 opportunity to do that throughout this process.

13 So thanks again for coming today and I
14 will go ahead and hand it over to Jason.

15 MR. JASON WEIERS: All right. Thank you,
16 Sam, and good morning, everybody. Thank you for
17 coming here today.

18 I am Jason Weiers, I'm manager of
19 transmission project development at Otter Tail and
20 speaking today on behalf of the Applicants for the
21 project. The Applicants include both Otter Tail and
22 Western Municipal Power Agency. Otter Tail and
23 Western Minnesota will co-own this project and
24 therefore we are co-Applicants in this application.
25 Western Minnesota is represented in this docket

1 through Missouri River Energy Services.

2 The project that Otter Tail and Western
3 Minnesota are requesting is a route permit for
4 approximately a 100-mile 345 kilovolt transmission
5 line that will go from Otter Tail's Big Stone South
6 Substation and it'll end at Western Minnesota's
7 Alexandria Substation on the southwest side of the
8 city of Alexandria. Similar to the transmission
9 line that you may have seen along Interstate 94, we
10 are planning to construct this line using
11 double-circuit-capable structures and one of those
12 circuits will be installed initially.

13 Along with the expansions that we'll need
14 to perform at each end point substation, we will
15 also install a fiber-optic regeneration station
16 along the central segment of the project. And this
17 fiber-optic regeneration station will be needed to
18 amplify the communication signals between two end
19 point substations.

20 As I mentioned earlier, structures for
21 the transmission line will appear similar to those
22 you see along Interstate 94, with the exception that
23 we do plan to use Cor-Ten steel rather than
24 galvanized steel. So what that means is that the
25 structures themselves will be more of a brown color

1 rather than the silver color that you see along 94.
2 We do expect the structures will range in height
3 anywhere between 120 and 180 feet tall. The
4 structures will sit upon a concrete foundation that
5 could be anywhere between 7 and 14 feet in diameter,
6 and those concrete foundations could be anywhere
7 between 25 and 80 feet deep depending on the soil
8 conditions. Distance between the structures could
9 be anywhere between 400 feet apart to 1400 feet
10 apart, and this again would depend on the route
11 that's approved, and then ultimately the geographic
12 terrain that we're traversing.

13 Lastly, I do want to also share that the
14 typical right of way that we'll need for this 345
15 kilovolt line will be 150 feet wide, we'll be
16 seeking to acquire 75 feet on each side of the
17 centerline of the structures for a total width of
18 150 feet.

19 Sam talked about the certificate of need
20 being approved by the Commission back in October of
21 2024. That need proceeding really went through why
22 this project is needed and who identified the
23 project. It actually came from a study performed by
24 the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or
25 MISO. MISO is the regional transmission

1 organization that oversees the planning of the
2 transmission system in this area. And in July of
3 2022, MISO approved a portfolio of 18 new
4 transmission projects needed to ensure a reliable
5 system in the future. One of those projects was the
6 Big Stone South to Alexandria Project that continues
7 down to Big Oaks shown as project 2 on this map
8 here.

9 So with the Commission previously
10 approving the need for the projects, we are here
11 today to talk about the scope of the environmental
12 review related to the route permit application that
13 the Applicants submitted to the Commission on
14 October 22nd of 2024. Given that part of this
15 transmission line does also traverse into South
16 Dakota, we also have applied for a facility permit
17 from the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission.
18 That process is currently underway and we expect a
19 decision from the South Dakota Public Utilities
20 Commission later in April of this year.

21 We have undertaken an extensive effort to
22 identify the routes that you see in the route permit
23 application. We have been participating in public
24 input sessions over the course of approximately 18
25 months, starting back in April of 2023, ultimately

1 leading to the route permit application that we
2 filed in October. And many of you may have
3 previously attended some of those open house
4 meetings.

5 Starting back in April of 2023 we shared
6 a study area in our first round of open houses
7 identifying the boundaries of which we're trying to
8 site the transmission project. We gathered feedback
9 from the open houses and refined the study area into
10 proposed project corridors. And we came back and
11 shared in a second round of public open houses in
12 October of 2023. We continued to refine the
13 corridors and came back for a third round of open
14 houses in February of 2024 where we shared the
15 proposed route corridors. And then most recently
16 back in June of 2024, we held our fourth round of
17 public open houses which shared our proposed route
18 options between that round of open houses. We did
19 consider information gathered from each round of
20 public open houses and used that to inform the
21 proposed routes that we included in our route permit
22 application.

23 So our proposed routes in the route
24 permit application are shown on slide 17 here.
25 You'll see that these routes start at the

1 Minnesota-South Dakota border and end at the
2 Alexandria Substation. Generally speaking, there
3 are two different route segment options from the
4 border to the Alexandria Substation, and as Sam
5 mentioned earlier, these route options vary in
6 length between 91 miles long to 105 miles long
7 depending on which route option is selected.

8 For the ease in reference and as we look
9 to analyze these during the upcoming environmental
10 impact statement, we have divided the route segment
11 options into three different areas. We have the
12 south area that's shown here in blue. We have the
13 central area that's shown in the orange color. And
14 the north area is shown in the purple colors.
15 Although we will only need 150 feet of right of way
16 for the easement required for the 345 kilovolt
17 transmission line, our route permit application
18 generally included a 1000-foot-wide corridor to
19 allow some flexibility to adjust that alignment
20 based on future landowner discussions.

21 The south route segments here are
22 proposed to be anywhere between 39 and 42 miles in
23 length, and these start at the Minnesota-South
24 Dakota border and they proceed east, generally, in a
25 direction towards Tara Township in Swift County.

1 The central route options vary anywhere
2 between 34 miles long to 39 miles long and these go
3 from Tara Township in Swift County up to Ben Wade
4 Township in Pope County.

5 And lastly, the north route segments are
6 anywhere between 18 and 35 miles in total length
7 from Ben Wade Township in Pope County up to the
8 existing Alexandria Substation in Douglas County.

9 So if you are a landowner along the
10 approved route, slide 21 gives a general
11 construction overview of what you can expect to
12 happen on your property along the right of way.

13 Starting first in the upper left-hand
14 corner, once we have land rights in place, we will
15 start with surveying the area and staking the
16 structure locations. Next we will establish
17 temporary access roads to get to the right of way.
18 The third step here, we will next install the
19 concrete foundations. After the foundations are
20 installed, we will then set the structures on those
21 concrete foundations. After the structures are set,
22 then next is stringing the conductor in place. When
23 we string the conductor we commonly use a helicopter
24 to aid in that installation of the conductor. And
25 then lastly we will restore our work areas and

1 remove the temporary access roads and re-seed those
2 areas that have been disturbed by construction in
3 coordination with the landowners.

4 slide 22 includes an estimated schedule
5 for the overall project. We do expect the Minnesota
6 permitting process to wrap up in the second quarter
7 of 2026.

8 After the Commission makes a decision on
9 the route, we will begin acquiring land rights for
10 the easements that we will need along the right of
11 way. We expect that process will take approximately
12 two years. Once we acquire land rights and have
13 permission to enter the property, we will start
14 performing our surveys to help support the other
15 permits that we need for this project from other
16 federal, state, and local agencies and will obtain
17 those permits towards the end of the first quarter
18 in 2028. And that would lead us to start of
19 construction in the spring of 2028 and we will be
20 wrapped up with construction by the end of 2030.

21 Granted, this schedule could change going
22 forward, there are a variety of different factors
23 that could play into that schedule, such as material
24 lead times, contractor availability, and weather
25 conditions, but the current time frame we're

1 estimating in late 2030.

2 My contact information is included here
3 on this slide. If you have further questions or
4 would like additional information, feel free to
5 contact me by phone or email. We also have a
6 project website we have set up with the opportunity
7 for people to leave us a comment, send us an email,
8 or you can also leave us a voicemail on our
9 toll-free number. Our website comments, voicemails,
10 and emails are monitored by a member of our project
11 team and we do our best to respond to questions and
12 comments within 24 to 48 hours.

13 With that, I'll turn it over to Jenna to
14 wrap us up.

15 MS. JENNA NESS: Hi. Jenna Ness with the
16 Department of Commerce. Thank you for taking time
17 out of your day and coming here today.

18 I'm the environmental review manager for
19 the project so I will be managing the environmental
20 impact statement.

21 I will briefly go over the Department of
22 Commerce's role in creating the environmental impact
23 statement, what that will look like. We'll discuss
24 how you can comment on this project today and then
25 we'll move into the oral comment period of the

1 meeting.

2 So the Department of Commerce conducts
3 environmental review for the Public Utilities
4 Commission as a neutral third party. We don't
5 advocate for or against a project, we just state the
6 facts. That's one of the purposes of the
7 environmental impact statement, or the EIS, as I'll
8 refer to it. It's a decision-making document with
9 the information needed for that information. And
10 one of the biggest things it does is evaluates the
11 potential human and environmental impacts as well as
12 ways we could maybe avoid or mitigate those impacts.

13 So today we're in the scoping process.
14 And this is a scoping meeting, which means we're
15 getting public input on what is basically the table
16 of contents for this document. So if you got a
17 draft scope as you walked in the front door, it
18 looks like this, and that is the proposed table of
19 contents for this document. And we're taking your
20 comments today on anything we may have missed in
21 there that you want us to look more specifically at.

22 The EIS is meant to focus in on the most
23 relevant information for the project to make those
24 informed decisions such as a potential route permit.
25 And that includes any proposed alternative routes

1 which you may have heard of today talking to people
2 around here. If you do suggest an alternative
3 route, for it to be accepted it has to mitigate a
4 potential impact. That could be a host of things,
5 including something as small as aesthetics, and it
6 must be specific and identifiable, which means I
7 have to be able to study it. So if you can draw on
8 a map that's the easiest way for me to pinpoint what
9 area you're looking at and what areas you want me to
10 look at.

11 So we'll move into the oral comment
12 portion shortly. That's a verbal comment you can
13 make on the record today. We have a court reporter,
14 so that's one way to get your voice and comments
15 into the record. You can also complete and submit a
16 comment sheet that was available at the front table,
17 it looks like this. This can be folded up and sent
18 to me in the postal mail. There is also a link on
19 there if you prefer to go on our website, or you can
20 email me directly. And just a reminder that the
21 comment period ends January 31st, at the end of this
22 month.

23 So I'm going to go over really quick here
24 that we can only have one speaker at a time because,
25 as I said, we have a court reporter here who needs

1 to be able to hear everything so she can get it in
2 the record. You also have to state your first and
3 last name for her and spell it.

4 And then we have quite a few people here,
5 so I will ask that you limit your initial comments
6 to a few minutes. We can always come back to you
7 once we get through the first round of people. And
8 you can be most helpful if your comments are
9 directed at the scope of the document. And, of
10 course, we're also here for questions. We have a
11 lot of representatives here and this is a good time
12 for you to ask any questions you have about the
13 project.

14 So this is just a reminder slide of what
15 the scope of the EIS is, which we're looking for
16 comments on any human and environmental impacts we
17 need to know about that we missed and it wasn't
18 specific enough, you know, anything specific about
19 the properties, and that's really helpful. As well
20 as any mitigation that you would want to see on
21 those impacts and then alternative routes.

22 So with that, I'll turn it over to Sam.

23 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. That was the
24 presentation.

25 So the rest of the meeting here is pretty

1 much about you. If you would like to come up and
2 speak publicly either to offer a comment or ask
3 questions. So there was a sign-in sheet here when
4 you walked in. Not too many folks signed up, so
5 I'll start with this, and if other folks, once I get
6 through this list, if other folks want to come up
7 and speak you can come up and do that one at a time
8 kind of thing.

9 The first one, actually the only one who
10 for sure indicated they wanted to speak was Lee
11 Hanson.

12 Thank you, Mr. Hanson. If you could
13 please state and spell your name for the court
14 reporter.

15 MR. LEE HANSON: I thought everybody
16 would want to talk.

17 Lee Hanson, L-E-E, H-A-N-S-O-N. My
18 address is 1010 West St. Germane Street, St. Cloud,
19 Minnesota.

20 I'm here today on behalf of a number of
21 irrigators in the Hancock, Morris, and Glenwood
22 area. We have had several meetings already with the
23 Big Stone representatives and we are supporting
24 alternate number two, and I'm here just to say that
25 publicly, and we will be intervening in the project.

1 MS. JENNA NESS: Thank you.

2 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. There was one
3 other person who signed up but did not say if they
4 wanted to speak or not. Carter Charles, did you
5 want to speak?

6 MR. CARTER CHARLES: No. Go ahead.

7 MR. SAM LOBBY: Sounds good, thank you,
8 sir.

9 With that, that was my list here.

10 I see a hand raised. Yes, sir, come on
11 up to the microphone, please, and state and spell
12 your name for the record.

13 MR. MIKE REESE: Mike Reese, 24520 400th
14 Avenue, 56244. M-I-C-H-A-E-L, R-E-E-S-E.

15 I will make a couple comments just to
16 reiterate the irrigation issue. The company has
17 been responding adequately to some of those issues,
18 but I wanted to make sure it gets on the record for
19 the Public Utilities Commission.

20 The irrigator situation, it's not
21 necessarily impacting a 150-foot right of way, it's
22 impacting quarters of land, 160 acres of land. And
23 if the irrigators are blocked by the transmission
24 poles, the transmission lines, it greatly reduces
25 the value of the land and productivity of the land

1 so it goes beyond a value in productivity level of
2 say \$10,000 per acre, it's cut in half to \$5,000 an
3 acre.

4 So this is really impactful for the
5 farmers that have irrigators. And the original plan
6 was to cut through the center of of these center
7 pivot irrigators that go through a field in a
8 circle. It also impacts the corners that are
9 irrigated sometimes. So that's a big issue and we
10 would appreciate just having that come forward for
11 the Public Utilities Commission to, you know,
12 information for them to review of this project.
13 And, again, the parties have been responding
14 adequately to that.

15 The second part I would like to comment
16 on is the prime farmland from an environmental and
17 EIS standpoint. You know, I think sometimes we take
18 that for granted and impacting the farmland is, in
19 this part of the country, even more important. And,
20 you know, impacting DNR and US Fish and Wildlife
21 land and that kind of thing. And I happen to notice
22 that in the route planning those routes are avoided,
23 the public environmental lands.

24 And this is a shared, you know, this is
25 for the shared good of the state and so I really

1 would appreciate the EIS and the Public Utilities
2 Commission to understand that why are farm lands
3 being considered for this route and the DNR and
4 other environmental lands are being avoided, when it
5 is a shared, good for the state, so I would like
6 that be considered in the EIS.

7 That, you know, if you're using a portion
8 of those DNR and US Fish and Wildlife lands, it's
9 not really that impactful because it's usually along
10 the roadway and it is very impactful if there is
11 irrigators across the road on the farm site, so
12 please keep that in mind too.

13 Thank you.

14 MS. JENNA NESS: Thank you.

15 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you. We appreciate
16 those comments, especially the specificity. It is
17 really helpful for us to have that level of
18 specificity, so thank you very much.

19 Are there any other folks that would like
20 to come up and speak today?

21 And just a reminder, too, if you don't
22 want to speak today, that's just fine. Written
23 comments, those can come through January 31st, and
24 I'll go back to the slide on that. So all comments,
25 including the written comment forms, written

1 comments, are looked at just the same as verbal
2 comments, so you don't get more points for speaking
3 in front of a crowd, and so you're more than welcome
4 to submit written comments.

5 Is there any other folks that would like
6 to speak?

7 MR. JIM WINK: Maybe some comments.

8 MR. SAM LOBBY: Yes, sir. Please state
9 and spell your name for the court reporter.

10 MR. JIM WINK: Jim Wink, spelled the same
11 way as wink, W-I-N-K, (indicating), which is the
12 corny way to help you remember.

13 Just general comments. I think, first of
14 all, our quest to provide power for electric
15 vehicles, which I don't think is going to work in
16 this part of the country, and also we're building
17 windmills and these power lines and also solar
18 panels.

19 One interesting thing I've learned is
20 that \$40,000 of solar panels on a house in Arizona,
21 desert floor, Chandler, to be exact. From the
22 longest days of the year to the shortest days, so I
23 know shadow over anyone's house, exactly how that
24 was affecting it. Location. There was about a 20
25 percent between the high wall of panels that fall

1 into a shadow versus the ones higher on the house,
2 there were 52 of them, by the way.

3 I think what floored me the most is
4 during that two weeks of longest days of the year to
5 the two weeks with the shortest days of the year
6 down there, and these panels are about 2012 models,
7 I don't know how much they've been improved, but it
8 just absolutely floored me that from the longest
9 days of the year to the shortest days of the year
10 down there, it cut production by 48 percent. You
11 gotta take a couple weeks so you can kinda get the
12 average.

13 I think a big mistake for me here in my
14 lifetime has been the fact that we didn't continue
15 with nuclear power. Big mistake. We're making
16 mistakes by scattering this stuff. We're going to
17 have a bunch of solar fields out there in 20 years
18 that are going to fall back on the landowners, as I
19 understand it they just want to lease the land.
20 Some of these comments are just not specific to this
21 line and there are general things to think about. I
22 can go on to more things about, but I'm going to let
23 somebody else comment. But I think it's something
24 that we've all made mistakes in what we're looking
25 at doing. And we dropped A bombs on Japan and they

1 did survive and we sure learned something from that,
2 but I'm not so sure we have.

3 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir, for your
4 comments, I appreciate that.

5 Are there any other folks that would like
6 to offer any comments or have questions for today?

7 I'm not seeing anybody chomping at the
8 bit for that.

9 So just a reminder that there are these
10 other ways to comment, this is not your only
11 opportunity. If there aren't any other comments,
12 then we'll conclude this part of the meeting. If
13 you have other questions for folks one-on-one,
14 that's just fine.

15 So I'll just put it out to the floor one
16 more time.

17 Any other folks want to speak?

18 All right. Well, with that, I just want
19 to thank you one final time, very much appreciate
20 you coming out here today, your comments and
21 anything that you submit to us is going to be looked
22 and the Commissioners do read all the comments, so
23 we appreciate your time.

24 There are still some cookies and coffee
25 over there, so help yourself on the way out.

1 Thanks, again, folks. I hope you all
2 have a great day.

3 (Proceeding concluded at 11:36 a.m.)

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SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 23-160
ORTONVILLE - JANUARY 16, 2025 - 11:00 A.M.
BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Application for a Route Permit for
the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345-kV Transmission
Project in West-Central Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. E017, ET10/TL-23-160

Sioux History Pavilion
1073 Lake Shore Drive
Ortonville, Minnesota 56278

January 16, 2025

STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Janet Shaddix Elling, RPR

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1 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. Well, it
2 looks like folks are getting settled in here, so
3 I'll go ahead and get the meeting started.

4 Thank you all very much for being here
5 today. My name is Sam Lobby. I'm with the
6 Minnesota Public Utilities Commission.

7 And today we are here to have a public
8 information and environmental review scoping meeting
9 on the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345-kV
10 Transmission Project. If you want to look this
11 project up online, you can go into Google. If you
12 go to type in "eDockets," it'll bring you to the
13 website for Minnesota, and the docket number you're
14 looking for is 23-160. And if you grab a copy of
15 the presentation here, that's all written on here.

16 So today we're having our fifth in-person
17 meeting. We had two on Tuesday, two yesterday, we
18 have this one this morning in person, and we have a
19 virtual meeting this evening. Every meeting is
20 covering the exact same stuff. So if you're at this
21 meeting, you're not missing anything that you would
22 get at another one.

23 So, with that, so what we're going to be
24 covering today. Again, I'm Sam Lobby with the
25 Public Utilities Commission. I'm going to go over

1 the permit application review process.

2 Then I will hand it over to Mr. Jason
3 Weiers with Otter Tail Power, and he will talk about
4 the proposed project itself.

5 Then, after that, Jenna Ness with the
6 Department of Commerce will talk about the
7 environmental review, which also will be referred to
8 as environmental impact statement. So that's kind
9 of the jargon term for the study that's going to be
10 done in this project. So if you see EIS or
11 environmental impact statement, that's the study,
12 and that's what we're looking for today is feedback
13 from you about what to study. Nothing is set in
14 stone here, so we want to hear from you all today.

15 And so after we get through this
16 presentation, we will open up the floor for
17 questions and comments. And as we mentioned to most
18 folks at the front as we had a chance to talk with
19 you, you're more than welcome to comment publicly
20 today. It will go on the record with our court
21 reporter here. But if you are not a public speaker
22 or don't want to comment or just don't think of
23 anything right away, you have until January 31st to
24 submit written comments. There's a comment form up
25 there, and we'll give you some information about

1 other ways to submit a comment.

2 So as I just mentioned, if you do offer
3 written comments, you have through January 31st for
4 this part of the process. You're at the very
5 beginning of this process. So there's going to be
6 other opportunities at different points throughout
7 the project where you can comment.

8 But just as an aside, even if you're
9 outside of the comment period, you're always welcome
10 to reach out to Jenna or myself. We're both with
11 the state. So we are not for or against the
12 project, we're just doing the permitting process.
13 So if you ever just want to reach out and ask us any
14 questions, you're more than welcome to do that.

15 So the purpose of today's meeting is,
16 first, to provide information about the proposed
17 project, as well as the state's high-voltage
18 transmission line route permitting process. And the
19 main point of the meeting is that we want to provide
20 you all, members of the public, an opportunity to
21 participate in the development of the scope of the
22 environmental impact statement. So what we should
23 study, we want to get your feedback on that.

24 So that's going to include comments on
25 potential impacts of the proposed project, as well

1 as comments on methods to minimize, mitigate, and
2 avoid potential impacts, and that includes proposing
3 alternative routes or route segments for
4 consideration. We'll provide all of you our contact
5 information in case you have questions later.

6 A little bit of background context: So
7 the government units that are going to be involved
8 in this process are, first, the Public Utilities
9 Commission, who I work for. We're the government
10 unit that reviews applications, and we issue site
11 and route permits in Minnesota.

12 Next, is the Department of Commerce.
13 They manage the environmental review process for the
14 Commission, and they prepare an environmental impact
15 statement on the proposed project.

16 Lastly, an Administrative Law Judge from
17 the Office of Administrative Hearings will
18 facilitate the public hearing later on in the
19 process, and provide a report to the Commission
20 setting forth findings of fact, conclusions of law,
21 and recommendations on the project.

22 So that's a little bit wordy, but kind of
23 to give you an idea of what that actually means, so
24 today we're getting your feedback on what we should
25 be studying. That study is going to take several

1 months. I think it's around September that it will
2 actually come out. So it's going to take eight,
3 nine months to do. It's a very rigorous study.

4 And, then, at that point we will release
5 the study, the draft of that, so you all have a
6 chance to react to it. Then, we come back here.
7 Same exact type of setup as this, but at that time
8 we will have an Administrative Law Judge who is
9 going to -- who is impartial and who will be
10 listening to all your comments and writing a report
11 based on your comments. And, then, you can tell us,
12 did we study what you thought we should study? So
13 that's what that's all about. I'll talk a little
14 bit more about that in a second.

15 Just a little more information on the
16 Minnesota Public Utilities Commission: The
17 Commission consists of five Commissioners that are
18 appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the
19 Senate. We regulate three service industries:
20 Electricity, natural gas, and telephone.

21 The mission is to ensure safe, adequate,
22 and efficient utility services at fair and
23 reasonable rates. And we provide independent,
24 professional oversight in regulation of utility
25 service providers in a manner that is consistent

1 with the public interest.

2 So with that, the project requirements:
3 So what is needed if this does get a permit? Before
4 the Big Stone South to Alexandria transmission line
5 project can be constructed, the Commission must
6 issue a route permit, and in this case, that is
7 going to be going through the full review process.

8 So the full review process is the most
9 rigorous process that there is in order --
10 evaluating whether or not a line will be permitted,
11 and that's required for any high-voltage
12 transmission line operating at a nominal voltage of
13 200 kV or more and greater than 30 miles in length.

14 Oftentimes with these transmission lines
15 you'll see a route permit and a certificate of need
16 going together. In this case, the certificate of
17 need was granted back in October of 2024, and that
18 was for part of the larger Big Stone South to
19 Alexandria to Big Oaks transmission project.

20 So if you've heard of a project that was
21 similar to this or maybe you went to some other
22 meetings like a year or so ago, that's what that was
23 about. That was just for the certificate of need,
24 and so that was when it was determined that there
25 was a need for this type of line. So that part is

1 over. Then, today is about the route permit, about
2 if the line is constructed, where it would go. So
3 that's the feedback we're looking for today.

4 So I won't get too deep into the details
5 of the project because Jason will be talking a
6 little bit more about that. The applicants are
7 proposing to build a new, approximately, 91- to
8 105-mile 345-kV double-circuit capable transmission
9 line. Only one circuit will be initially installed.
10 The proposed 345-kV line will run from the Big Stone
11 South substation near the Minnesota-South Dakota
12 border to the existing Alexandria substation near
13 Alexandria, Minnesota.

14 This transmission project is needed to
15 address the regional reliability issues on the
16 existing 230-kV system in western and central
17 Minnesota.

18 So, again, just to give you a little more
19 clear shot of what to expect here moving forward:
20 You are at the very beginning of this process. So
21 we really appreciate you being here to comment and
22 get your feedback. That can help shape what
23 actually comes out of this.

24 So there's plenty of time, there's a
25 number of other comment periods. There's lots of

1 time to learn more and give us more feedback. So
2 you're getting involved at the right time.

3 The application was initially submitted
4 in October of 2024, and then accepted in December of
5 2024. That third line down is the public
6 information meetings, and so that's where we're at
7 today. As I mentioned, we've held five of them,
8 including this one, in person, and we have a virtual
9 meeting tonight.

10 Then, the next step is to take your
11 feedback from these meetings, and then Jenna will
12 incorporate that into the scoping decision. So the
13 scoping decision is what would be studied. Then,
14 that will come out in March or April of 2025,
15 tentatively.

16 Then, once she's made that scoping
17 decision, then she will do that study. So as I
18 mentioned, it's a very rigorous study. It takes
19 several months. She really digs into detail on the
20 environmental impacts and on proposed alternative
21 routes that you might give us.

22 And then once she's finished with that,
23 the draft of that will come out in September,
24 roughly, of 2025. And so that's what I was
25 mentioning earlier where the draft will come out,

1 you'll have a chance to react to that, and then
2 about a month later, we'll come back. We'll have
3 another meeting just like this. A judge will run
4 that meeting, and then we'll get your feedback on,
5 did we study what you think we should have studied?

6 And then based on that feedback, then
7 Jenna will go back, look at the EIS again, and
8 finalize it. And that would come out in,
9 tentatively, December of 2025. So then the final
10 Commission decision is tentatively scheduled for
11 March of 2026.

12 So there's quite a long time before
13 anything actually happens. Again, nothing is set in
14 stone, and nothing's going to happen really fast.
15 And everything will be transparent for you, and,
16 again, you're more than welcome to reach out to us
17 if you ever have questions.

18 So with that, I will pass it off to Jason
19 with the company.

20 MR. JASON WEIERS: All right. Thank you,
21 Sam.

22 As Sam mentioned, my name is Jason
23 Weiers. I'm from Otter Tail Power Company. I'm the
24 manager of transmission project development, and
25 today I'm speaking on behalf of the applicants in

1 this proceeding. And the applicants are Otter Tail
2 Power Company and Western Minnesota Municipal Power
3 Agency. Otter Tail and Western Minnesota will
4 co-own the project, and through this proceeding,
5 Western Minnesota is being represented by Missouri
6 River Energy Services.

7 The project that Otter Tail and Western
8 Minnesota are requesting a route permit for is an
9 approximately hundred-mile, 345-kilovolt
10 high-voltage transmission line from Otter Tail's Big
11 Stone South substation, just west of Big Stone City
12 in South Dakota, to Western Minnesota's Alexandria
13 substation on the southwest side of the city of
14 Alexandria.

15 If you've ever traveled the interstate
16 between the Twin Cities and Minneapolis -- I'm
17 sorry, between the Twin Cities and Fargo, you may
18 have noticed transmission structures along
19 Interstate 94. The structures we're proposing for
20 this project will look very similar to that. They
21 will be double-circuit capable structures, and at
22 this time, we are only planning to install one
23 circuit.

24 Along with the expansions at each
25 endpoint substation, we may also install what we

1 call a fiber-optic regeneration station, and this
2 will be located somewhere along the central segment
3 of the line. This fiber-optic regeneration station
4 is needed to amplify the communication signals
5 between the two endpoint substations.

6 MR. SAM LOBBY: Sorry for the pause.
7 Folks, we'll just be a second.

8 MR. JASON WEIERS: We'll continue here.
9 As I mentioned earlier, the structures that we plan
10 for this transmission line will look similar to
11 those along Interstate 94, with the exception that
12 we plan to use what we call COR-TEN steel rather
13 than galvanized steel. So as shown on this picture
14 here, the structures are planning to have a brown
15 color to them rather than a gray color.

16 The typical structures will be between
17 120 and 180 feet tall, and they will sit upon a
18 concrete foundation. That's expected to be anywhere
19 between 7 to 14 feet diameter, and that concrete
20 foundation could be anywhere between 25 and 80 feet
21 deep depending on the soil conditions. The
22 structures will be between 400 and 1,400 feet apart
23 depending on the route and geographic terrain that
24 we cross with the transmission line.

25 Lastly, I'll also point out that the

1 right-of-way that we will be seeking for the project
2 will be 150 feet wide, and that will include 75 feet
3 on either side of the centerline of these
4 structures.

5 Sam talked earlier about the need for the
6 project being previously approved by the Minnesota
7 Commission back in October of 2024. The need
8 actually came from a study performed by the
9 Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO.
10 They performed a long range transmission planning
11 study between 2020 and 2022, and the result of that
12 study was the identification of 18 new transmission
13 projects across the Midwest that will help ensure a
14 resilient and reliable transmission system into the
15 future. One of those transmission projects was the
16 Big Stone South to Alexandria project, shown as
17 project number two on this map.

18 So with the Commission previously
19 approving the need for the project, today we are
20 here to discuss the scope of the environmental
21 review within the route permit application that
22 Otter Tail and Western Minnesota submitted to the
23 Commission back in October of 2024.

24 Given that part of this project is also
25 located in South Dakota, we have also applied for a

1 facility permit from the South Dakota Public
2 Utilities Commission, and we expect the decision on
3 the facility permit application no later than April
4 of this year.

5 We have undertaken an extensive effort
6 over the course of the last 18 months with four
7 rounds of open houses to gather information that we
8 considered in identifying the proposed routes
9 included within our route permit application.

10 Starting back in April of 2023, we hosted
11 our first round of open houses where we shared a
12 study area that included an outline of the area that
13 we were considering for routing this transmission
14 project. In October of 2023, we hosted our second
15 round of open houses, and we narrowed that study
16 area into proposed project corridors and shared
17 that, again, through our second round of open
18 houses.

19 In February of 2024, we came forward with
20 proposed route corridors during our third round of
21 open houses. And, finally, in June of 2024, we had
22 our fourth round of open houses where we shared our
23 proposed route options for inclusion in our route
24 permit application.

25 During each round of public open houses,

1 we gathered information from landowners, and during
2 the same time, we also consulted with several of the
3 agencies to identify the proposed routes you see in
4 the application.

5 So slide 17 has our proposed route
6 segments from the route permit application, and,
7 again, these start at the Minnesota-South Dakota
8 border and end at the Alexandria substation.
9 Generally speaking, as you look at these two routes,
10 you'll see that there's two route segment options,
11 and they have a varying length between 91 miles and
12 105 miles depending on which route option is
13 selected through this process.

14 For the ease in analyzing these route
15 options, we have divided these route segment options
16 in the three different areas. We have the south
17 segment shown in blue, the central segment shown in
18 orange, and then the north segments that are shown
19 in purple.

20 Although we only need 150 feet of
21 right-of-way for this 345-kilovolt transmission
22 line, our corridor -- our route permit application
23 generally included a 1,000-foot-wide corridor to
24 give us flexibility in locating the transmission
25 line after we engage with landowners.

1 The south route segments vary in length
2 between 39 miles and 42 miles from the
3 Minnesota-South Dakota border to a point in Tara
4 Township in Swift County. The central route
5 segments vary in length between 34 and 39 miles in
6 total length from Tara Township up to Ben Wade
7 Township in Pope County. And, finally, the north
8 route segments vary in length between 18 and 25
9 miles, and these go from Ben Wade Township in Pope
10 County up to the existing Alexandria substation in
11 Douglas County.

12 If you are a landowner along the approved
13 route, slide 21 includes a general construction
14 overview of what you can expect on your property.
15 The first step after we have land rights in place is
16 to perform surveys, and through this survey process,
17 we would stake the proposed structure locations.
18 Next, we would establish temporary access roads to
19 get our equipment out to the right-of-way. The
20 third step here is installing the concrete
21 foundations.

22 After the foundation is installed, we
23 would set the structures on the foundation. The
24 structures are hauled to the structure site,
25 assembled, and then lifted into place with a crane.

1 After the structure is set, we will then string the
2 conductor, typically with the help of a helicopter.
3 And the last step in the construction process is to
4 restore the work area, and this includes removing
5 the temporary access roads and then reseeding those
6 disturbed areas in coordination with the landowners.

7 Sam shared the permitting schedule on an
8 earlier slide, and this slide shows more of the
9 overall project schedule. Sam talked about the
10 Minnesota permitting process to wrap up in the March
11 timeframe of 2026. After a Commission decision of a
12 route, we will begin acquiring land rights for the
13 150-foot of right-of-way that we need for this
14 project.

15 After the land rights are secured, we
16 will perform field surveys, and this information we
17 gather from the field surveys will be used to help
18 support other federal, state, and local permits that
19 we need to construct the project. We expect these
20 additional permits could take an additional two
21 years to obtain.

22 We anticipate starting construction in
23 the spring of 2028, and have construction wrapped up
24 by the end of 2030. The schedule shown on this
25 slide is subject to change based on a number of

1 different assumptions at this time, but is based on
2 the best information we know as of today.

3 My contact information is listed on the
4 next slide. If you have further questions or would
5 like additional information following this meeting,
6 you're always welcome to reach me by phone or email.
7 I would also like everyone to know that we have a
8 project website that's been set up, and on this
9 website, there's opportunities for interested
10 stakeholders to provide comments.

11 They can send us an email, or they could
12 even call our toll-free hotline or the phone number
13 that we have set up and leave a message. We do have
14 representatives of our project team monitoring each
15 one of these channels each day, and we do our best
16 to respond to comments and questions within 24 to 48
17 hours.

18 And with that, I'll turn it over to Jenna
19 to wrap up the presentation.

20 MS. JENNA NESS: Hi. I'm Jenna Ness with
21 the Department of Commerce. Thank you for taking
22 time out of your day to come to our public meeting
23 today. I'm the environmental review manager for the
24 project, which means I will be managing the EIS.
25 I'll briefly go over the Department of Commerce's

1 role and what creating that EIS looks like. Also,
2 how you can comment. There's many ways to comment,
3 and then we'll get into the oral comment portion of
4 the meeting.

5 The Department of Commerce conducts
6 environmental review on behalf of the Commission.
7 We are offering an objective analysis of the
8 project. We offer just the facts. It's an
9 information-gathering document. The goal is to
10 provide that information of the project to the
11 public and other interested parties, and also to
12 help decision-makers -- such as the Public Utilities
13 Commission -- make decisions with, such as a route
14 permit.

15 The main things we'll be doing in the EIS
16 will define strategies to avoid and mitigate
17 impacts, as well as identifying all the human health
18 and environmental impacts that could occur from the
19 project.

20 Today we're in a scoping meeting, which
21 means we are trying to narrow in the EIS to focus on
22 the most relevant issues. The scope of the EIS is
23 essentially the table of contents. To put it
24 simply, if you grabbed a draft scope on the way in,
25 it looks like this (indicating). That is a general

1 overview of what the EIS is proposed to go with.
2 And, again, that's the human and environmental
3 impacts, and strategies to mitigate those impacts.
4 As well as proposed routes, and any that you may
5 want to propose that are different than what you
6 have seen today.

7 If you want to propose an alternative
8 route for consideration in the EIS, it must mitigate
9 a potential impact. That can be something as simple
10 as a disturbance to your viewshed. And it must also
11 be specific and identifiable. And what I mean by
12 that is that I need to be able to study the specific
13 area, and so it's best if you can draw on a map
14 physically so I can see what you're talking about
15 and make sure I study the correct area.

16 So there's many ways to comment. When we
17 move into the oral public comment portion of the
18 meeting today, the court reporter will take down
19 your comment, and that will get in the record.
20 There was also comment sheets on your way in that
21 look like this (indicating). You can fill those out
22 and hand them into me directly before the end of the
23 meeting today.

24 Or my postal address is also on the back
25 of that, and you can mail that into me by the 31st,

1 that's the end of the comment period. If you have
2 an alternative route, if you could staple it to your
3 comment form so it doesn't get separated, that would
4 be very helpful.

5 We also have a link online if you prefer
6 to go there. If you have a copy of the
7 presentation, you have that link. And then my
8 personal information is on here as well. You can
9 just send me an email. That's also a comment if you
10 would like it to be.

11 So before we move into your comments, I
12 just want to go over some things. We can only have
13 one speaker at a time so the court reporter can get
14 everything accurately into the record. In that same
15 vein, we need you to state your first and last name
16 and spell it for the court reporter.

17 And if you could direct your comments to
18 the scope of the EIS, that is the most helpful.
19 We're also here today to answer questions if you
20 would like that. It's a good opportunity to do so
21 because we have all the representatives in one room.

22 So with that, I'll hand it to Sam. I've
23 got a reminder slide up here about what the scope of
24 the EIS means and the kind of comments we're looking
25 for. Thank you.

1 MR. SAM LOBBY: All righty. Thank you
2 very much for your patience as we went through the
3 presentation. With that, I will open the floor up
4 here. So we have the sign-in sheet. I've only got
5 a couple of folks that signed up, so I'll start with
6 them. But once we get through them, if other folks
7 want to come up and speak, you're more than welcome
8 to.

9 And just a reminder, as Jenna just said,
10 if you don't want to speak, there are a bunch of
11 other ways: Either the written comment forms in the
12 back or email or online, and you have until January
13 31st for that.

14 So our first person signed up was
15 Ron Schmidt. Would you like to come and speak, Ron?
16 And if you could please state and spell your name
17 for the court reporter. Thank you.

18 MR. RON SCHMIDT: Yeah. My name is Ron
19 Schmidt, S-C-H-M-I-D-T.

20 And, first of all, I'd would like to say
21 I wrote a five-page letter sent to the state, given
22 the few different areas here today, and I would
23 encourage every one of you out there to do the same
24 thing. Tell them your concerns and hardships in all
25 of the above.

1 The project, I think you can see by here,
2 a lot of us here are against this project. If they
3 want all that power in Minneapolis, in the big
4 cities, put the solar farms and wind turbines and
5 the things down closer to Minneapolis, and don't
6 come out here and destroy us landowners and our
7 farmers' way of life.

8 To start out with, the first meetings
9 they had, they mentioned it will not impact any
10 farmland, farmers' hardship, or anything like that.
11 It would stay on the existing easements and so
12 forth. Well, as we have seen in maps in the
13 proposal, that's kind of a lie. Now, they're going
14 right through a lot of middle-of-farmers' land and
15 making it a real hardship that way.

16 You're talking about the big poles and so
17 forth. I mean, they're huge. They're big and huge.
18 And I would like to know why the DNR, the Fish and
19 Wildlife, and so forth, how can they be God, judge,
20 and jury? They won't let any structures or
21 easements go through any of their land, why should
22 we, as farmers, landowners, let you do the same
23 thing? Now, we'd like to have those -- this area
24 here, we would like to see the project go north, but
25 those landowners have the same feelings as we have

1 here.

2 And if you can explain to me why in the
3 past all the health concerns from static electricity
4 and stuff for humans and for livestock, the
5 scientists, the engineers, the government, they
6 can't tell us why the stray voltage and so forth has
7 an effect on humans and livestock.

8 And I'd also like to propose to the
9 officials, let's say, Minneapolis or the big cities,
10 the organization, we want to put a bike trail or
11 walking trail in the area, let's go right through
12 the middle of your backyard. How would they feel to
13 destroy their backyard, their evenings, and so
14 forth?

15 Now, you talked about the concerns and so
16 forth that we have as landowners and farmers.
17 Something like this is going to devalue our farm
18 property, our land tremendously.

19 A few years ago, I was in the process of
20 putting irrigation in. Well, with the ROI, I
21 couldn't justify it at that time. Well, for those
22 of you who don't know what ROI is, it's return on
23 investment. So that's on hold right now.

24 What about farmers getting big equipment,
25 farming equipment? 12-, 24-, 36-, and even 48-row

1 corn planters and equipment, and they're getting
2 bigger as time goes on. How are we supposed to
3 manipulate about that -- aerial spraying, fungicide,
4 and so forth -- when the corn gets four, five feet
5 tall? Airplanes can only go so close to the power
6 lines. We have the 100 feet, 150 feet under the
7 power lines, how are you going to get an applicator
8 to come in and spray five, six, seven acres at one
9 time? You know, it's just not possible. It's a
10 big, big inconvenience.

11 Now, what about the interference with all
12 the electronics and stuff? We have GPS, cell
13 phones, two-way radios, even drones and stuff that's
14 coming into the industry right now. All the
15 mapping, all the soil gridding and so forth they
16 have.

17 So when you have all these things come
18 near your property, your farm setup, the middle of
19 your farm, I'm thinking about, I probably won't be
20 here, but I'm looking at my future generation, my
21 kids, the trust. And you had mentioned earlier, for
22 right now one line is proposed. What's going to
23 stop you coming back 10, 15 years from now and doing
24 it over again and putting another one in with an
25 easement that you're going to do?

1 You talk about an easement. The word
2 "perpetual," most people think it's a hundred years,
3 or 99 years. We're talking perpetual easement for
4 the life of the earth, the life of the land. How
5 can you justify coming in and destroying our way of
6 life, our way of farming, and so forth?

7 One of the brochures I looked at, it
8 had -- after the route is taken, whichever it is,
9 north, south, wherever this goes, if they do, the
10 capital gains that you're going to have to pay on
11 this land, whatever the price that they settle on.
12 How do you come up with a fair market value on
13 something like this when it's a perpetual lifetime
14 easement? You're talking -- you're talking
15 thousands and thousands of dollars.

16 And whatever figure they're going to come
17 up with, you take that times many, many times,
18 because this is the future of the land of our rural
19 area of farming out here. There's no way you can
20 put a fair market value on something like this.

21 Okay. And, also, when your settlement --
22 or whatever it may be, is it a one-time deal? Is it
23 over -- so much per year, whatever that deal is?
24 And the capital gains that we're going to have to
25 pay on this, use whatever figure you want, use

1 \$50,000, \$100,000, 50 percent of that is going to go
2 to the government for taxes depending on what taxes
3 you're in. 40 percent maybe. 35, 40 percent,
4 whatever tax bracket you're in. It will also
5 increase your -- us people over 65, our Medicare,
6 our drug policy. It might put you into the next
7 bracket, and that's going to increase your monthly
8 fee as you go along.

9 I talked to my kids on this. There's --
10 we talked about this a lot. They're devastated by
11 the fact that they will own this land some day.
12 They'll be farming it or renting it out, whatever
13 the case may be. They're going to have to deal with
14 all this, and they don't want nothing to do with it.

15 So as you can tell, I'm not very happy
16 with the whole situation. Because we have built --
17 we worked our whole life for building up our farms,
18 our environment out here, and you're going to come
19 in. How can you justify destroying our way of life
20 out here?

21 Now, after today -- I didn't realize
22 this, but I'll be submitting a couple more forms of
23 different routes, you know, my suggestions. It's
24 just a suggestion. But how can the impact from the
25 government come out and destroy our way of living

1 and farming?

2 So with that, thank you.

3 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, Mr. Schmidt,
4 for your comments.

5 Our next speaker on the list here,
6 Dalen Roe, do you still want to speak?

7 MR. DALEN ROE: Yes, sir.

8 MR. SAM LOBBY: Please -- I'm sorry if I
9 mispronounced your name at all. If you could state
10 and spell your name for the record, please.

11 MR. DALEN ROE: Yeah. My name is Dalen
12 Roe, and it's D-A-L-E-N, R-O-E.

13 And, yeah, just, there's kind of the two
14 proposed routes, like, that go by. One of them is
15 right across the road from me, and the other one is
16 a half-mile north. And I think I've got some
17 neighbors here, too, that have the same feeling.
18 You know, going along 430th Street, the proposal is
19 to, kind of, jump back and forth across the road to
20 avoid residents along there.

21 And it was just -- I was just looking at,
22 you know, if they're going to pay on 150 feet and
23 they're across the road, it looks like, my
24 calculation, they're going to pay me 32 feet. And
25 am I correct that you wouldn't pay anything to the

1 township for the right-of-way? Is that why you're
2 proposing that to avoid -- do you pay right-of-way
3 fees to the township?

4 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: I can answer that.
5 Thanks. Christy Brusven.

6 We would typically not have the
7 facilities in the road right-of-way because they're
8 pretty narrow road right-of-ways that the township
9 has. So we would be paying the private landowners
10 adjacent to the township right-of-way.

11 We'll work with the townships on road
12 agreements for the use of the road to make sure that
13 they're maintained, and that if there is any damage
14 related to construction, that that road is returned
15 as good or better than before. But that would be
16 the typical interaction we have with the townships.

17 MR. DALEN ROE: So the right-of-way that
18 you would pay would be -- you would go further out
19 into the private property to avoid the township
20 right-of-way, is that what you're saying?

21 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: There may be cases
22 where it could be overlapped with the private and
23 the public, if there's overhang, for example. But I
24 think if you have a specific property that you're
25 looking at, it's probably most helpful to go to a

1 map and look at it with one of our representatives
2 and talk about what it may look like there. Because
3 there's a couple of different scenarios for overlap
4 or being adjacent to the road right-of-way.

5 MR. DALEN ROE: Okay. Well -- and the
6 route that I'm talking about by my place is, kind
7 of, an alternative, half-mile north. And that's,
8 you know, through cropland, and it's kind of on
9 property lines. Some of it goes through landowners'
10 fields.

11 But another concern I had was, you know,
12 you mentioned putting up the line with a helicopter,
13 and I have cattle, you know, in that pasture pretty
14 much all the time. And what kind of effect -- do
15 you move the cattle during that time? Or -- because
16 I can't imagine they would stay in the fence with
17 the helicopter overhead.

18 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thank you, Mr. Roe.
19 Actually, when it comes to the construction
20 activities, we will be in very close communication
21 and coordination with the landowners to ensure that
22 you can be aware of what we're working on when we're
23 working on it, so that we can coordinate as best we
24 can to minimize impacts to your operations there.
25 So if there's opportunities to move them to a

1 different pasture for a duration of time, we'd want
2 to coordinate with you on that.

3 MR. DALEN ROE: Okay. Also, you know,
4 you talk about easements, I was -- I don't know who
5 I was talking to, but they said they basically do a
6 present market value, and they'll pay 100 percent on
7 the 150 feet. And, then -- but, like, I think Ron
8 mentioned, you know, what is the value of land? You
9 know, 30 years ago, there was -- the Fish and
10 Wildlife was buying easements really cheap, and I
11 think maybe in some cases there was some hardship,
12 you know. People needed the money to exist, so they
13 took them up on it, and they've regretted it ever
14 since.

15 And, you know, it was my dream to have a
16 hobby farm. I work in town, but, you know, having
17 power lines across the road from me would really
18 diminish what I have there.

19 And I also wonder about the long-term
20 effect. Like, my house would still be, you know,
21 fairly close to these wires and the constant humming
22 of the lines. And, also, the effects on, you know,
23 livestock being -- you know, grazing right up to the
24 road. And, I guess, I would prefer the north route.

25 So I think that's all I have. Thank you.

1 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir.

2 All right. Those are the only folks that
3 actually checked the box to speak. Are there any
4 other folks that are interested in speaking publicly
5 today?

6 Yes, sir. If you could please come up to
7 the microphone, and state and spell your name.

8 MR. ALAN WEBSTER: Thanks for hearing me.
9 My name is Alan Webster, A-L-A-N; Webster,
10 W-E-B-S-T-E-R.

11 Mr. Schmidt said a mouthful there, but
12 I'm at the beginning of it. Once we get passed the
13 Ortonville lagoon, so Dalen is right there. These
14 lines would be, maybe, 250 feet from his house. And
15 then the line would go through on the southern --
16 more southern route.

17 Then, the line goes through the area
18 where I calf 270 cows in the springtime. Then,
19 you're going to jump back across the road, go behind
20 the next neighbor, Dennis Buescher. Then, you're
21 going to jump back across the road and go in front
22 of Jeff McMahon's. Then, you're going to stay on
23 that side of the road, jump across the road, and go
24 in front Brett Huizenga. And then you keep going
25 down the line, and run into Jackie -- in front of

1 Jackie Maas's house.

2 Then, you've got to jump back across the
3 road again to get past Duane Hillman. So you're
4 bouncing back and forth over the road, but you're
5 still just a few feet, in perspective, for how high
6 they are versus how far away from the houses that
7 you are.

8 So I just want to state that if this line
9 has to be, okay, through our area, a much better --
10 and I don't mean to -- I don't mean to -- because
11 now I'm getting a little closer to Kathy over here,
12 but I can't think of her last name. But, anyways,
13 it would be halfway between Kathy and Dalen would be
14 the northern route. The south end -- the north side
15 of the south end.

16 Okay. So, anyways, excuse me. If the
17 line has to be, you would affect far less people and
18 it would be a straight shot through some boundary --
19 property boundary lines. There would be some water
20 that you've got to mitigate, but you would be
21 affecting so many fewer people by being on that
22 northern route instead of the southern part of it.
23 So, like I say, if it has to be, then it has to be.
24 But let's look at going north instead of down where
25 you're going to affect everybody else.

1 So that's all I had to say. Thank you.

2 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir, for your
3 comments. I appreciate that.

4 Are there any other folks that want to
5 speak publicly?

6 And just a reminder, too, I'll put this
7 slide up so folks have it. If you don't want to
8 speak publicly, you can offer written comments.
9 Those are looked at exactly the same. So you have
10 until January 31st to provide those.

11 Any other folks that want to speak today?

12 Yes, sir. If you could please state and
13 spell your name for the record.

14 MR. MARLOWE KLEPEL: Marlowe Klepel.
15 That's M-A-R-L-O-W-E, K-L-E-P-E-L.

16 Now, if you -- when Al just mentioned if
17 this power line has to be, I am on the east side of
18 21, and my son and I own land there. And we
19 proposed a different route, which I see is on here,
20 and that would completely take out a lot of line
21 running across tillable acres, destroying people's
22 ability to farm, and it also is -- doesn't affect
23 any homeowners as far as I know.

24 So that would be -- if it has to be, that
25 would be the route that -- when it gets east of 21,

1 that would be the northern part of that route. So,
2 okay, thank you.

3 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, sir. I
4 appreciate that.

5 Any other folks that want to speak
6 publicly?

7 Yes, sir.

8 MR. JAMES WAGAR: My name is James Wagar,
9 W-A-G-A-R.

10 And I guess I just have a question, if
11 there's been studies done on water impacts. A lot
12 of people around here have their own wells, and
13 those foundations go pretty deep. I don't know what
14 all chemicals are used in them to harden the
15 concrete and things like that. I'd like to make
16 sure that there's a proper study done on that.

17 MS. JENNA NESS: Thank you. So we do
18 discuss how deep the transmission poles are going to
19 go and what the concrete -- I'm not going to use the
20 right word -- casing on the bottom is composed of.
21 And we look at that in relation to how deep the
22 aquifer may be, and talk about how groundwater can
23 transfer and eventually make it to the aquifer. So
24 we do look at groundwater impacts and how
25 construction is related to that.

1 As far as specific studies, we've always
2 looked for the most recent information. But we do
3 include those in our EIS, and we have footnotes to
4 those if you ever want to double check our sources.

5 MR. JAMES WAGAR: Thank you.

6 MS. JENNA NESS: Yeah.

7 MR. SAM LOBBY: Also, just to add on to
8 that a little bit, too, you folks in the area, you
9 know the area the best, and so if there are things
10 that you want to offer comments on, you know, we use
11 databases and we talk to other agencies and stuff,
12 but there are things that you might know about that
13 you can offer us in your written comments that Jenna
14 can look into for studying. So that's where your
15 comments can be very useful for determining those
16 kinds of impacts. So thank you for your comment.

17 Are there other folks that might like to
18 speak publicly? And just a reminder, too, that you
19 can do written comments. So any other folks?

20 Yes, if you would like to come up.

21 MS. ANN HOLME: It's not a comment, but a
22 question. Does that still need to be up here?

23 MR. SAM LOBBY: Yeah. You need to state
24 and spell your name, please.

25 MS. ANN HOLME: My name is Ann Holme.

1 A-N-N, last name is H-O-L-M-E.

2 I'm a little bit -- my husband, Peter,
3 and I are a little farther east on this project, but
4 I was wondering if Mr. Wires -- or Weiers could take
5 some time and explain the blue -- light blue/dark
6 blue. I'm trying to get an understanding from
7 everyone else here just exactly how you are making
8 that determination, or why the two different routes
9 are looked at and how you're going to determine
10 that.

11 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thank you, Ms. Holme.

12 MS. ANN HOLME: Slide 18, I guess.

13 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right.

14 MR. JASON WEIERS: On the route permit
15 application that we have submitted, we do have two
16 route segment options in the south area of the
17 project, and we've included both route options for
18 evaluation by the EERA, the Department, to take a
19 look at the environmental differences between those
20 two route options. And through the upcoming study
21 that Jenna and her team will be performing, they
22 will identify the benefits and detriments of each
23 option.

24 So at this point in time, either option
25 is being considered, and we'll learn more about each

1 of those proposals, along with other proposals
2 proposed through this process as part of that
3 environmental impact statement being prepared.

4 Ultimately, the Minnesota Commission will
5 decide which route option is selected. It could be
6 one of these two; it could be an alternative. And
7 lot of that would be based upon the upcoming process
8 that Sam talked about.

9 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you very much for
10 that question.

11 Any other folks have any questions or
12 comments they would like to offer?

13 I'll keep repeating the same thing, that
14 if you do want to comment, there are other ways
15 that you don't have to speak. You can grab a
16 comment form on your way out. I'll open it up one
17 more time here, and if we don't have any other
18 comments, then we can conclude the meeting. And you
19 can hangout for a little bit and ask more questions
20 one-on-one, if that's helpful.

21 Are there any other folks that would like
22 to speak?

23 All right. I think, not seeing
24 anybody -- oh, yes, sir. You're more than welcome
25 to offer a second comment.

1 MR. ALAN WEBSTER: Al Webster, again.

2 So on the well side of things, my well
3 will be just a tick less than a half mile from
4 wherever there may be a tower put. So my well is 93
5 feet deep, and then it bottoms out on granite. So I
6 can't imagine that right around me there's too many
7 with any much deeper wells or anything like.

8 Some of these cement towers are 70 feet
9 deep, something like that, roughly. So even though
10 my well is, like, 93 feet deep, I only have to go
11 down 35 feet for water. There's a lot of water in
12 that. Okay. So if you're going to go down 73 feet
13 with this cement, you're going to be -- there again,
14 one of the closest places to any of these towers
15 would be Dalen's place. I'm not sure how deep his
16 well is, but, there again, if you're down 70 feet,
17 73 feet for these cement pillars, whatever, you're
18 down into his aquifer, per se, maybe even mine,
19 maybe even Dennis's, something like that.

20 That's really something that needs to be
21 looked at for your study. Whereas, if we were to
22 follow the more northern route on this project, we
23 would be, roughly, half-mile from any well,
24 something like that. So just the well situation.

25 Thank you.

1 MR. JASON WEIERS: Mr. Webster, if I
2 could just offer a quick comment on that. As part
3 of the process for building this project, once we
4 have an approved route and landowner permissions, we
5 will be performing a geo-tech investigation on a
6 structure-by-structure basis. And we'll be looking
7 at soil conditions to determine the depth of the
8 necessary foundation.

9 And as we talked about earlier, those
10 foundations could vary anywhere from 25 feet deep,
11 the most extreme cases we'd see, maybe, 80 feet
12 deep, but it sounds like in this situation it would
13 be much less than that. But I did want to assure
14 you that we will design each foundation based on the
15 specific soil conditions at that location.

16 MR. ALAN WEBSTER: So you kind of drill
17 down for core sampling and things like that?

18 MR. JASON WEIERS: Correct.

19 MS. JENNA NESS: And I'd also like to
20 mention -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- these
21 foundations are generally composed of nonhazardous
22 material. So it's not like hazardous waste is going
23 to flow into the aquifer from the foundation.

24 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you very much for
25 that comment, and I also just appreciate your

1 specificity with that, too. That makes it easier
2 for us to look into the study.

3 So, Mr. Schmidt, if you could restate
4 your name, please.

5 MR. RON SCHMIDT: Yeah, Ron Schmidt.
6 R-O-N, S-C-H-M-I-D-T.

7 Talking about water level, our wells in
8 my area and quite a few of my neighbors sitting back
9 here, we're down 15 to 18 feet. We got
10 water-bearing sand. So we don't have to go very
11 deep, which we're fortunate that we've got all the
12 water we need right there. So I just wanted to put
13 that into the comments.

14 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you for that, sir.

15 All right. Any other folks? We had a
16 little jolt there at the end. Any other folks that
17 would like to speak, you're more than welcome to
18 come and do that now.

19 All right. Maybe that was the last of
20 it. You're more than welcome to still speak here if
21 you'd like, but, once again, I'll just put the slide
22 up here. We'll leave this up just so you have that.
23 And there's also information about how to comment at
24 the front, including the comment form, which you can
25 just put a stamp on and mail to us.

1 So I'll ask one more time, and if not,
2 then we'll conclude the meeting. Any other folks
3 interested in speaking?

4 All right. Well, with that, I just want
5 to thank you one last time for taking time out of
6 your day to be here. We really appreciate you being
7 here and participating in the process. Your
8 comments are very much valued by the Commission and
9 Commerce in terms of doing the studies and making
10 any final decisions, so thank you very much. And,
11 again, always feel free to reach out if you have
12 questions.

13 Have a great day, and feel free to grab
14 some cookies and coffee on your way out if you
15 haven't already. Thanks, folks.

16 (Proceeding concluded at 11:56 p.m.)

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SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 23-160

VIRTUAL - January 16, 2025 - 6:00 P.M.

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Application for a Route Permit for
the Big Stone South to Alexandria 345-kV Transmission
Project in West-Central Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. E017, ET10/TL-23-160

Meeting held remotely via:

Webex and Telephone

January 16, 2025

STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Christine Simons, RMR, RPR

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1 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right. Folks, we
2 have 6:00, so we will go ahead and get the meeting
3 started, stay on time. And I just really appreciate
4 everybody's time tonight. We know that this is an
5 extra thing for you in the evening, and just very
6 much appreciate you being here. Your comments are
7 really useful and important for any sort of
8 decision-making that the PUC is going to make
9 regarding this project.

10 So my name is Sam Lobby. I'm with the
11 Public Utilities Commission, and tonight we are
12 going to be talking about the public information and
13 environmental review scoping meeting, which is the
14 topic of tonight, for the Big Stone South to
15 Alexandria 345-kV transmission project.

16 If you look this up online, you can -- if
17 you want to follow everything that's in the record,
18 you can go to Minnesota eDockets. If you just type
19 "eDockets" into Google, that's a real easy way to
20 get there, and then you type in in the search bar
21 "23-160," which is the docket number.

22 So this is the last of six meetings that
23 we've done so far this week. We did five in person,
24 and then there's this virtual meeting. So if you
25 are just attending the virtual, you weren't able to

1 make any of the in-person, you aren't -- you're not
2 getting anything different as far as what we're
3 going to be presenting and talking about at this
4 meeting. The main difference between the in-person
5 and the virtual was that there were maps and stuff
6 available, and an opportunity to talk with the
7 company and get map printouts, things like that.

8 But since we're virtual, you can just
9 reach out to any of us: Myself, Mr. Jason Weiers
10 with Otter Tail Power, or Ms. Jenna Ness with the
11 Department of Commerce. If you reach out to any of
12 us, then we can help you with any mapping questions
13 in terms of where your property is in relation to
14 the transmission line or any questions you might
15 have.

16 So, once again, thank you for coming
17 tonight. So just a quick agenda of what to expect
18 for tonight. I am -- again, I'm Sam Lobby with the
19 Public Utilities Commission. I'm going to talk
20 about the permit application review process. Next,
21 Jason Weiers with Otter Tail Power Company will talk
22 about the proposed project itself, and then Jenna
23 Ness with the Department of Commerce will talk about
24 the environmental review piece.

25 So as I mentioned just a minute ago, if

1 you have any questions about mapping or anything
2 like that, any questions at all, you can reach out
3 to me. That's my contact information, and I can get
4 you set up with the right people to get that
5 information.

6 So the purpose of tonight's meeting is,
7 first, to provide information about the proposed
8 project, as well as the State's high-voltage
9 transmission line route permitting process. And
10 another big piece of the evening is to provide you
11 all, the public, an opportunity to participate in
12 developing the scope of the EIS.

13 So what that means is, the EIS is a
14 jargon term for environmental impact statement, and
15 basically what that means is it's a study of the
16 project before anything is done. So just so folks
17 understand how this is working, we're talking about
18 the route permitting process tonight, but this route
19 is not set in stone. We want to get your feedback,
20 and so myself and Jenna, both with the State, we are
21 not advocating for or against the project. We just
22 want to get your feedback on the project to know
23 what you think about it.

24 So the things that we're looking for for
25 comments are comments on potential impacts of the

1 project, as well as commenting on methods to
2 minimize, mitigate, and avoid potential impacts, and
3 that includes proposing alternative routes or route
4 segments for consideration. And Jenna will talk a
5 little bit more about that in a couple of minutes.

6 So I did just provide my contact
7 information; both Jason and Jenna will provide
8 theirs as well. So if you have questions after the
9 meeting, you can reach out to us, and you'll be able
10 to find this online as well if you go back to the
11 docket.

12 So the government units that are involved
13 in this project are, first, of course, the Public
14 Utilities Commission, who I work for. We are the
15 government unit that reviews applications and issues
16 site and route permits in Minnesota. Next, is the
17 Department of Commerce, who Jenna works for, and
18 they manage the environmental review process for the
19 Commission and prepare an environmental impact
20 statement, which is the study we're seeking feedback
21 on on the proposed project.

22 An Administrative Law Judge from the
23 Office of Administrative Hearings will facilitate a
24 public hearing later on in the process, and provide
25 a report to the Commission setting forth findings of

1 fact, conclusions of law and recommendations on the
2 proposed project. So just a little bit more
3 background on that last one, with the Administrative
4 Law Judge. Basically, tonight we're at the very
5 beginning of this process. So if you're here for
6 the meeting, you're getting involved at the right
7 time.

8 So we want to get your feedback on things
9 about what we should study in the environmental
10 review, and that includes alternative routes. And
11 so we're going to -- we will take that feedback, and
12 then several months from now, kind of, third to
13 fourth quarter of the year, we will do a study that
14 incorporates a lot of what you're going to tell us
15 you think should be studied.

16 And then we'll do that study, we'll
17 release the study, and give you all time to react to
18 it. And then we'll have another meeting just like
19 this, except it will be run by the Administrative
20 Law Judge, and then we will get your feedback on if
21 the study looked at the things that you thought we
22 were proposed to look at or things like that. And
23 I'll explain a little bit more about the timeline in
24 a minute.

25 So a little more background on the PUC,

1 the agency consists of five Commissioners appointed
2 by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. We
3 regulate three service industries:

4 electricity, natural gas, and telephone. Its
5 mission to provide safe, adequate, and efficient
6 utility services at fair and reasonable rates. And
7 we provide independent, professional oversight and
8 regulation of utility service providers in a manner
9 that is consistent with the public interest.

10 So in order for a project like this to
11 get permitted, the Big Stone South to Alexandria
12 transmission line project needs to have, in this
13 case, a permit granted by the Commission, and that
14 permit is a route permit. So as you can see
15 there -- route permit -- this is going through the
16 full review process. That's the most rigorous
17 process that there is for permitting, and that's
18 required for any high-voltage transmission line
19 operating in a nominal voltage of 200 kilovolts or
20 more and greater than 30 miles in length.

21 For this project, the certificate of need
22 process, sometimes you will see the certificate of
23 need and route permit go through at the same time.
24 In this case, the certificate of need process
25 already happened and was granted back in October of

1 2024, and that was part of the larger Big Stone
2 South to Alexandria to Big Oaks transmission
3 project. You may have participated in some of those
4 meetings, either in person or virtual. So if some
5 of this sounds familiar, that's why, because that
6 part of the process, the need was already granted,
7 and so that part of the process is already complete.

8 If you are interested in looking back at
9 anything related to the certificate of need, you can
10 go to that same eDockets website. So that's -- you
11 know, just type "eDockets" into Google is the
12 easiest way to get there, and then the docket number
13 for that project was 22-538.

14 So in this case, tonight we are just here
15 to talk about the route permit, and so we want to
16 get feedback from you about the route that is being
17 proposed for this project.

18 I won't get too deep into the proposed
19 project itself because Jason with the company will
20 talk more about that. But the short version is that
21 the applicants are proposing to build a new,
22 approximately, 91- to 105-mile, 345-kV
23 double-circuit-capable transmission line. Only one
24 circuit will be installed initially.

25 The proposed 345-kV line will run from

1 the Big Stone South substation near the
2 Minnesota-South Dakota border to the existing
3 Alexandria substation near Alexandria, Minnesota.
4 This transmission project is needed to address
5 regional reliability issues on the existing 230-kV
6 system in western and central Minnesota.

7 So I said that I'd give you an idea of
8 the timeline, so, again, we appreciate you being
9 here tonight and getting involved because this is
10 the very beginning of the process. This is the
11 first opportunity to comment on the project through
12 the formal permitting process. So we very much
13 appreciate you being here and participating.

14 The application was submitted in October
15 of 2024, and then it was accepted in December of
16 2024. That third line down, the public information
17 meeting, that's where we're at right now. So I
18 mentioned that we already had five in-person
19 meetings. We had them in Alexandria, Hancock,
20 Benson, Ortonville, and now we're doing the virtual
21 tonight -- and Glenwood. Excuse me, also Glenwood,
22 and then the virtual tonight, so a total of six
23 meetings.

24 So as part of these meetings, as I
25 discussed earlier, we want to get your feedback

1 about what should be included in the environmental
2 review, and that includes looking at alternative
3 routes. And so once we take that feedback, Jenna
4 will look at your feedback, and then she'll come up
5 with an EIS scoping decision. So that means, based
6 on your comments, she will decide what is going to
7 be actually studied in the environmental review, and
8 she'll make that decision tentatively in March to
9 April of 2025.

10 Then, she will go ahead and do that
11 study, and so it's a very rigorous study. It will
12 take several months for her to complete. She looks
13 very in depth at everything that you're concerned
14 about, and then she will release a draft
15 environmental impact statement, tentatively, in
16 September of 2025.

17 And so once that draft is issued, you
18 will have several weeks to look at that and react to
19 it and digest it. So you'll have plenty of time to
20 see what we put together. And then after that, then
21 we'll come back to do a meeting just like this.
22 This is the point where I mentioned with the
23 Administrative Law Judge, and so we'll have public
24 hearings. It will be the same thing. We'll do five
25 in person and one virtual, and that will be,

1 tentatively, in September to October of 2025.

2 And then after those hearings, a final
3 EIS will be issued. So Jenna will take your
4 comments from that second hearing and update the EIS
5 based on that, as needed, and so the final EIS would
6 be, tentatively, issued in December of 2025. And,
7 then, a final decision by the Commission would be
8 coming, tentatively, in March of 2026.

9 So with that, I will go ahead and hand it
10 over to Jason with the company. Thank you very
11 much, once again, for coming, and we very much
12 appreciate you being here.

13 MR. JASON WEIERS: All right. Thank you,
14 Sam.

15 And good evening, everyone. As Sam
16 mentioned, my name is Jason Weiers. I am from Otter
17 Tail Power Company, and I am currently the manager
18 of transmission project development here at Otter
19 Tail.

20 Tonight I am representing the applicants
21 that have filed a route permit application. The
22 applicants in this proceeding are Otter Tail Power
23 Company and Western Minnesota Municipal Power
24 Agency. Western Minnesota Municipal Power Agency is
25 represented by Missouri River Energy Services in

1 this proceeding.

2 The project that Otter Tail and Western
3 Minnesota are requesting a route permit for involves
4 the construction of an approximately 100-mile,
5 345-kilovolt transmission line that will go between
6 Otter Tail's Big Stone South substation, just west
7 of Big Stone City, South Dakota, to Western
8 Minnesota's Alexandria substation on the southwest
9 side of the city of Alexandria.

10 Similar to the transmission structures
11 that you may have noticed along Interstate 94, we
12 are planning to construct this line using
13 double-circuit-capable structures, and only install
14 one circuit at this time.

15 Along with the expansions needed at each
16 of the endpoint substations, the project also
17 includes a fiber-optic regeneration station that we
18 expect will be installed along the central segment
19 of the project. This fiber-optic regeneration
20 station is needed to amplify the communication
21 signals between the two endpoint substations.

22 As I mentioned earlier, the structures
23 for the project will look similar to those along
24 Interstate 94, with the exception that we plan to
25 use what we call COR-TEN steel rather than

1 galvanized steel. And the main difference is that
2 the structures will appear to be a brownish color
3 rather than a gray color.

4 We do expect the typical structures will
5 be anywhere between 120- and 180-feet tall. The
6 structure will sit on a concrete foundation that may
7 be anywhere between 7 and 14 feet in diameter, and
8 has a foundation depth anywhere between 25-feet to
9 80-feet deep depending on soil conditions.

10 The structures are anticipated to be
11 anywhere between 400 and 1,400 feet apart, depending
12 on the route and the geographic terrain that will be
13 traversed by the transmission line.

14 Our typical right-of-way for a
15 345-kilovolt transmission line is 150 feet wide.
16 That involves 75 feet on each side of the center
17 line of the structures.

18 Sam talked about the certificate of need
19 proceeding on a previous slide, and that need
20 proceeding was concluded and the need was approved
21 by the Commission back in October of 2024. But just
22 for background, the project was identified by the
23 Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO
24 for short. About four years ago, they launched a
25 long-range transmission planning study looking at

1 future needs in the transmission system. And in
2 July of 2022, MISO approved a portfolio of 18 new
3 transmission projects across the Midwest that are
4 needed to help ensure a reliable and resilient
5 transmission system. As you'll see on this map, the
6 Big Stone South to Alexandria project is part of
7 project number two.

8 So with the Commission previously
9 approving the need for the project, today we are
10 here to discuss the scope of the environmental
11 review related to the route permit application that
12 was filed by Otter Tail and Western Minnesota in
13 October of 2024.

14 Given that part of this project does go
15 into South Dakota, we have also applied for a
16 facility permit from the South Dakota Public
17 Utilities Commission, and we expect to have a
18 decision from the South Dakota Public Utilities
19 Commission no later than April of this year.

20 We have undertaken an extensive effort
21 over the course of the last 18 months with four
22 rounds of open houses to gather information that we
23 considered in developing the routes that appear in
24 our route permit application. Starting back in
25 April of 2023, our first round of open houses

1 included a study area that included an outline of
2 the area we were considering for routing this new
3 transmission line.

4 We gathered feedback from the public, and
5 came back for a second round of open houses in
6 October of 2023, where we had reduced the size of
7 the study area down to the project corridors.
8 Continuing to gather feedback from landowners, we
9 continue to further refine those corridors into
10 route corridors, and came back for a third round of
11 open houses in February of 2024.

12 Through additional comments and
13 refinement of those corridors, we held a fourth
14 round of open houses in June of 2024, where we
15 shared our proposed route options for the
16 transmission line.

17 We gathered feedback not only from
18 landowners but other interested stakeholders and
19 agencies throughout this process to help identify
20 the proposed routes that appear in our route permit
21 application.

22 Is everyone else's slide blank?

23 MR. SAM LOBBY: Oh, is it blank for you?
24 I can see it on my end. Here, I'll go back one.
25 Can you see that?

1 MR. JASON WEIERS: No, I'm just seeing
2 white, but I'll continue with my slides here. So on
3 slide 17, Sam?

4 MR. SAM LOBBY: Yeah, I'm on slide 17.

5 MR. JASON WEIERS: Okay, perfect.

6 Our proposed route segments from the
7 route permit application are shown on slide 17.
8 And, again, these start at the Minnesota-South
9 Dakota border and end at the Alexandria substation.

10 Generally speaking, you'll see two route
11 segment options from the Minnesota-South Dakota
12 border over to the Alexandria substations, and these
13 route segment options represent a cumulative length
14 anywhere between 91 miles in length to 105 miles in
15 length depending on which route option will be
16 chosen or selected throughout this process.

17 For ease in reference, we have analyzed
18 the route options in different segments. The south
19 segments are shown in blue, the central segments
20 here are shown in orange, and the north segments are
21 shown in purple.

22 Although we will only need 150 feet for
23 the right-of-way for this new 345-kilovolt
24 transmission line, our route permit application
25 generally included a corridor width of 1,000 feet to

1 allow us some flexibility in moving the center line
2 of the transmission line once we get into the
3 negotiations with landowners.

4 MR. SAM LOBBY: Just one second here,
5 Jason.

6 Hey, Jenna, are you able to see the
7 slides at all?

8 MS. JENNA NESS: I can see slide 17.

9 MR. SAM LOBBY: Okay. Are you able to
10 see it now, Jason?

11 MR. JASON WEIERS: It's still blank on my
12 end, but let's proceed.

13 MR. SAM LOBBY: Okay. I'll go to slide
14 18.

15 And just a quick note for folks online
16 who are watching, if you're not able to see the
17 slides, I can understand that that would be pretty
18 frustrating. So I will get these posted onto the
19 eDockets website right away so that you are able to
20 go back and review what we talked about in case you
21 aren't able to see them. So sometimes Webex has
22 some glitches like this, so we very much apologize
23 if you are having trouble seeing them.

24 All right. Sorry, Jason. Back to you.

25 MR. JASON WEIERS: All right. Thanks,

1 Sam.

2 Slide 18 shows the south route segment
3 options. These vary in length between 39 miles and
4 42 miles in total length, and these go from the
5 Minnesota-South Dakota border to Tara Township in
6 Swift County.

7 The central route segments are anywhere
8 between 34 and 39 miles in total length, and these
9 go from Tara Township in Swift County up to Ben Wade
10 Township in Pope County. And the north route
11 segments vary in length from 18 miles and 25 miles
12 in length, and they go from Ben Wade Township up to
13 the Alexandria substation in Douglas County.

14 If you are a landowner along the approved
15 route for the project, slide 21 shows a general
16 construction overview of what you can expect on your
17 property. Starting first in the upper left-hand
18 corner, once we have the land rights in place, we
19 will start with surveying and staking the proposed
20 structure locations. Next, we will establish
21 temporary access roads for equipment to get out to
22 the right-of-way.

23 Next, we will install the concrete
24 foundations. After the foundations are installed,
25 we will set the structure on the foundation. The

1 structures are actually hauled out to site in three
2 pieces, installed at the structure location site,
3 and then raised into place with a crane. After the
4 structures are set, we will then string the
5 conductor, typically with the use of a helicopter.

6 And, lastly, once we have the conductor
7 in place, we will restore the work area by removing
8 the temporary access roads and reseeding the
9 disturbed areas in coordination with the landowners.

10 Sam covered the permitting schedule that
11 is expected over the next, roughly, year or so here.
12 As we fit that in with the overall project schedule,
13 you'll notice that we do expect the permitting
14 schedule in Minnesota to wrap up in Q2 of 2026.
15 After a Commission decision of a route, we will
16 begin acquiring land rights for the 150 feet of
17 right-of-way that we need for the transmission line.

18 After land rights are secured, we will
19 perform field surveys that will help support other
20 federal, state, and local permits that are needed
21 for the project. We expect this process will take
22 approximately two years. Under the current
23 schedule, we do anticipate starting construction in
24 the spring of 2028 and wrapping up by the end of
25 2030. The schedule, of course, is subject to change

1 based on a variety of different factors such as
2 material lead times, contractor availability, and
3 weather conditions.

4 If you have any questions or would like
5 any additional information following this meeting,
6 feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail. My
7 contact information is shown here on slide 23.
8 Alternatively, we have also set up a project website
9 where interested stakeholders are able to view the
10 latest information for the project, as well as leave
11 us a comment, send us an e-mail, or leave us a
12 voicemail on our toll-free number. The website
13 comments, the e-mail comments, and the voicemails on
14 our hotline are monitored by a member of our project
15 team, and we try to get back to messages within 24
16 to 48 hours.

17 With that, I'll turn it over to Jenna
18 from the Department to cover the next part of the
19 presentation. Thank you.

20 MS. JENNA NESS: Thanks.

21 Hi, my name is Jenna Ness. I'm with the
22 Department of Commerce, and I'm the environmental
23 review manager. I will be managing the
24 environmental impact statement, or the EIS, for this
25 project. I'll be using that acronym quite a bit

1 throughout the presentation. And I just also want
2 to thank you everybody for taking time out of their
3 night to meet with us.

4 Next slide, please.

5 So the Department of Commerce's role is
6 what we'll go over partially in the agenda here.
7 We'll also talk about what creating the EIS looks
8 like, all the different ways you can comment during
9 this public comment period, and then we'll get into
10 the questions and oral public comments portion of
11 tonight's meeting.

12 Next slide, please.

13 So the Department conducts environmental
14 reviews on behalf of the Commission, and we offer
15 objective analysis on the project. So we don't
16 advocate for or against the project. We just
17 outline the facts, and that -- the goal then is to
18 make an information-gathering document which will
19 ultimately be used so that the public can understand
20 the project and its impacts. As well as, provide
21 that information to any decision-makers, such as the
22 Public Utilities Commission will be looking at
23 issuing a route permit. The EIS will be looking at
24 ways to avoid or mitigate those impacts, and that --
25 those are human health and environmental impacts

1 that could occur because of the project.

2 Next slide, please.

3 So today we are at the scoping meeting,
4 which means we're getting our public input on the
5 table of contents of the EIS, and that's so we can
6 focus the EIS on the most relevant information
7 that's needed to make informed decisions, such as
8 that route permit.

9 That also includes alternatives that
10 people can offer to the proposed route that could
11 mitigate impacts. So you can offer an alternative
12 route into the record before the end of the comment
13 period. In order for that to be accepted and issued
14 in the scoping decision, it needs to mitigate a
15 potential impact, and that can be anything, a whole
16 range of human or environmental impacts and
17 something as simple as a disturbance to the
18 viewshed.

19 And, second, it needs to be specific and
20 identifiable, and what we mean about that is that I
21 need to know the area to study. So the easiest way
22 to get that information to me is to draw it on a map
23 what your alternative route is so I can go in on the
24 specific area that you drew in and make sure that
25 it's as accurate as possible.

1 Next slide, please.

2 So, shortly, we'll begin the oral public
3 comment part of today's meeting. That will go into
4 the record. We do have a court reporter on the call
5 today, so all of this is being recorded. You can
6 also comment online at this link. I can put it in
7 the chat so it is easier to access than typing it
8 from this presentation.

9 My contact information is on here as well
10 if you prefer to write out a letter and send it in
11 the postal mail. I will also place that in the
12 chat. And my e-mail address is here, and if -- you
13 can submit a comment to my e-mail. I'd ask if you
14 do that to please include the docket number, 23-160,
15 and I will put all that in the chat as well. Just a
16 reminder that the comment period ends the end of
17 this month, January 31st.

18 Next slide, please. And the next one.

19 This is just a reminder of what the scope
20 of the EIS means. As we're about to begin taking
21 public comments, if you could narrow in your
22 comments on the scope, that is the most helpful.
23 And that's any potential human and environmental
24 impacts you want to make sure get covered.

25 We do cover a host of topics, so feel

1 free to ask us questions tonight, everybody.
2 There's representatives from each party here, so
3 this is your best time to ask questions. And then,
4 also, any strategies you want us to include to
5 mitigate those potential impacts. Those are the
6 most helpful comments.

7 So I'll hand it off to you, Sam.

8 MR. SAM LOBBY: Thank you, Jenna.

9 So we are concluded with the presentation
10 piece, so the rest of the evening will be to take
11 your questions and comments. So it looks like we've
12 already got one person who figured out how to do it:
13 Brian.

14 So, Brian, you'll be first.

15 I'll just explain here in just a second
16 how folks can do this. So if you are online, you
17 can either do the raise-hand function. There's --
18 the blue circle on this picture is circling about
19 where that is, or you can type in the chat box that
20 you would like to say something.

21 Although, if you're going to use the chat
22 box, we don't want to take your comments in the chat
23 box because the court reporter isn't able to monitor
24 both verbal comments and the chat. So if you do
25 want to use that, just let me know, and then I can

1 call on you.

2 If you're calling in on the phone, it
3 looks like we do have a few phone callers, you can
4 just press *3. And that will indicate that you want
5 to speak, and I will call on people in the order
6 that they have raised their hands. So that's the --
7 that's how you can participate in the public
8 speaking portion.

9 If you are not somebody that likes to
10 speak publicly, Jenna already mentioned those ways
11 to comment. So your verbal comments are going to be
12 looked at exactly the same as any written comments
13 that you submit. Again, those are due by January
14 31st. So you've got plenty of time to think about
15 if you do want to, or, you know, if you think of
16 something after this meeting that you didn't get a
17 chance to say, there's still plenty of time for you
18 to let us know. And I'll repeat that information
19 again, too.

20 So with that, we'll go with our first
21 question or comment, and that's coming from Brian.
22 So, Brian, I just unmuted you. If you could please
23 state and spell your first and last name for the
24 record.

25 (No response.)

1 MR. SAM LOBBY: Can you hear me, Brian?

2 Is anybody else able to hear Brian?

3 MS. JENNA NESS: I cannot.

4 MR. SAM LOBBY: Okay. Yeah. Brian, I'm
5 not able to hear you. Are you -- I suppose, maybe
6 if you can type in the chat if you're able, maybe if
7 there's audio issues or something like that. If you
8 needed to, you could maybe -- sometimes Webex is not
9 the easiest.

10 Oh, he doesn't have anything. Gotcha.
11 Okay. Thank you, Brian. Appreciate that. No
12 worries at all. All right. I will re-mute you
13 again.

14 Sometimes Webex has some glitches. So I
15 never know if it's working right or not. It's not
16 always the smoothest program, but that's what we
17 have.

18 So I am not seeing any other folks
19 raising their hands. So I'll just say, I'll give it
20 a little bit longer in case anybody does want to
21 speak or if they're just trying to figure out how.
22 So, again, here, if you're using a phone, you can
23 press *3. If you are online, you can use the
24 raise-hand or chat function.

25 And just, once again, real quick, too, I

1 will put Jenna's slide back up again here as far as
2 how to comment. So if you -- if you do want to
3 comment but public speaking isn't your thing, that's
4 totally fine. We want to accommodate everybody.

5 Oh, we do have someone who just raised
6 their hand. I will just go ahead and leave this up
7 so that you have that information while we're
8 listening to the next commenter.

9 So I've got a caller, 612-309. If you
10 could please state and spell your name for the
11 record, I have you unmuted.

12 MR. JAMES SMITH: Sure. The name is
13 James Smith.

14 MR. SAM LOBBY: All right.

15 MR. JAMES SMITH: And hopefully you
16 can --

17 MR. SAM LOBBY: Yeah, we can hear you.

18 MR. JAMES SMITH: Okay. Great. I joined
19 late. Apologies.

20 MR. SAM LOBBY: No worries.

21 MR. JAMES SMITH: So on the last -- on
22 the last route map that I believe I have, there were
23 two alternatives: One, a northern kind of a route,
24 and then a southern kind of a route. What's the
25 timeline for putting all that and submit -- and

1 picking one over the other?

2 MR. SAM LOBBY: As far as the permitting
3 timeline is concerned, that's -- this is the very
4 beginning of the process. So as far as that is
5 concerned, this is really the first opportunity to
6 offer comments. So those two routes are not --
7 nothing has been decided yet, and there are still
8 opportunities for you to suggest any sort of
9 alternatives or alternative segments or things like
10 that. So you're getting involved at the right time.
11 There will be a number of other opportunities for
12 you to comment throughout this whole process.

13 But as far as your question about how
14 long it will take, a tentative decision for this by
15 the Commission for the permitting piece would be
16 March of 2026. So it's quite a ways out. So,
17 again, nothing's set in stone, and any comments you
18 have as far as what the route looks like on the maps
19 that you have, you can submit that to Jenna, and she
20 can study those.

21 I'm not sure if any other folks want to
22 respond to his question on any other pieces. Jenna
23 or Jason, do you have anything you wanted to add?

24 MR. JASON WEIERS: Mr. Smith joined a
25 little bit late. I'm not sure what point he joined,

1 but if he has any questions about the project
2 schedule, I'd be happy to repeat that as well.

3 Just as a quick refresher, once we have
4 the route permit decision from the Commission, we
5 would start our land rights efforts, and we expect
6 that will be, approximately, a two-year time frame.
7 In that two-year time frame, we'll be performing
8 field surveys, and that will be used to support
9 obtaining other federal, state, and local permits we
10 need for the project. Assuming that everything goes
11 well, we would start construction in the spring of
12 2028 and have the project completed by the end of
13 2030.

14 MR. JAMES SMITH: Got it. Thank you
15 much.

16 MR. SAM LOBBY: Oh, go ahead, Jenna.

17 MS. JENNA NESS: The only other thing I
18 have to add is if we could go to the timeline
19 slide -- well, I guess it's a call-in user, they
20 might not be able to see that. But if you can see
21 in the chat, I did put a link in there, and there is
22 an interactive map on that link if you want to zoom
23 in on your property, if that's helpful.

24 MR. JAMES SMITH: Thank you.

25 MR. SAM LOBBY: Yes, sir. Did you have

1 any other questions?

2 MR. JAMES SMITH: No, that's all I -- all
3 I needed to know. Thank you.

4 MR. SAM LOBBY: Great, thank you.

5 And just as a heads-up, I'm not -- I'm
6 assuming since you're calling in, you can't see
7 what's on the slide, but if you do have any --

8 MR. JAMES SMITH: I have -- I now have
9 both the phone and the Webex running, so I can see
10 your slide.

11 MR. SAM LOBBY: Oh, okay. Great. Sounds
12 good.

13 If there's anyone else on the line that
14 can't see the slides and you're wondering about
15 contact information, worst-case scenario is you go
16 online to the PUC website and reach out. Just
17 reference this project, and whoever you reach out
18 to, just ask them to please forward them to the
19 person in charge of this project. And -- which is
20 me -- Sam Lobby -- and we can get through to you
21 that way.

22 All right. Thank you, Mr. Smith. I'm
23 going to go ahead and mute you.

24 So, now, I'm not seeing any other hands
25 raised. I'll give another little bit here in case

1 any other folks do want to speak, if it takes you a
2 second to figure out where to -- what button to hit.

3 And just a reminder, with this slide that
4 is up right now, that's another way that you can
5 comment. It's looked at exactly the same. Public
6 speaking isn't weighted higher than the written
7 comments or anything. So you're more than welcome
8 to use those methods as well. And, also, as Jenna
9 mentioned, she did put all of that information in
10 the chat as well.

11 Are there any other folks that would be
12 interested in speaking tonight?

13 I'm still not seeing anyone. So with
14 that, I'll just kind of recap one more time, and
15 just give you one more minute here if there is
16 someone that's trying to figure out how to speak.

17 So we just want to thank you, once again,
18 for coming tonight. We really appreciate your
19 participation, and your participation does really
20 matter. So that is very important for the
21 decision-making process and for helping Jenna to do
22 her environmental study. So we understand it's
23 taking time out of your night, but it really does
24 count for something. So thank you very much for
25 your participation.

1 And I'm still not seeing any other hands.
2 So with that, we will go ahead and conclude the
3 meeting. Thank you all, again, so much for coming,
4 and always feel free to reach out to us later on
5 with questions. I hope you all have a great night,
6 and we will talk to you later.

7 MS. JENNA NESS: Thanks.

8 MR. JASON WEIERS: Thanks, everybody.

9 (Proceeding concluded at 6:39 p.m.)

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