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August 23, 2017

Mr. Bob Anderson, Chairman
Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
State Office Building, Room G95
100 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Re: Great Northern Transmission Line

Dear Mr. Anderson,

I'm writing in response to your letter dated August 7, 2017 on behalf of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC), concerning its approval of the conveyance of right-of-way for the Great Northern Transmission Line (GNTL) over lands subject to conservation easements purchased via the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF).

First, let me express my thanks to the LSOHC for approving the conveyance of easements for this important project. Your support helps us access clean, flexible and renewable energy while contributing to the security, comfort and quality of life for our customers. It was a pleasure getting to know you and others from the LSOHC during the many open-house meetings and public hearings that occurred from 2012 through 2016.

Regarding the LSOHC request for certain routing considerations, it's necessary that I provide some background on the GNTL permitting process and how routes are ultimately determined. Beginning in early 2012 and continuing into 2014, Minnesota Power hosted a series of public open-house meetings designed and managed to solicit valuable input on routing constraints as well as opportunities. The campaign was strategically planned to isolate and define the best possible routes. Based on this unprecedented public input, Minnesota Power applied to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) for a route permit on April 15, 2014. Almost two years later, after a long public process and joint State/Federal EIS, the PUC voted to grant a Route Permit for GNTL on April 11, 2016. Since then, Minnesota Power has completed a detailed engineered design of the entire 225-mile route and crafted several route-dependent management plans for the protection of environmentally sensitive resources. The route was chosen by the PUC through a very deliberate and inclusive process. It cannot and should not be altered easily.

The good news is the PUC selected a route that successfully balances engineering considerations with environmental concerns while respecting the input of thousands of land owners, community leaders and tribal authorities. Approximately 130 miles of the total 225 are co-located with existing transmission lines, minimizing habitat fragmentation. In southern Koochiching County and Northern Itasca County, the location of much of LSOHC interests, over 50 miles of the GNTL route follow two existing transmission lines. Furthermore, the GNTL ROW will be maintained differently than what has historically been common practice for transmission owners. The approved vegetation management plan calls for selective clearing in the outer thirds of the ROW, allowing lower-growing woody vegetation to persist. The resulting early successional forest provides ideal habitat for certain species of concern, such as the golden-winged warbler.

I hope this letter addresses the Council's concerns. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions at (218) 343-9119, or jbatkinson@mnpower.com

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James B. Atkinson".

James B. Atkinson
Environmental and Real Estate Manager

JBA:tb

cc: Thor Underdahl, Minnesota Power
Representative Dan Fabian