



Citizens Energy Task Force (www.cetf.us)
5700

Media Contact: Jeremy Chipps, 608-317-5700

April 17, 2009 - For Immediate Release

UTILITY COMM'N APPROVES CAPX2020 POWER LINE DESPITE DECLINE IN ENERGY DEMAND
-CITIZENS GROUP WARNS OF IMPENDING DAMAGE TO UPPER MISSISSIPPI WILDLIFE REFUGE-

St. Paul, MN— The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission heard oral argument this Wednesday and voted to approve a “need” for all three power lines in the CapX2020 proposal. The motion to reopen the record in light of new evidence of falling electric demand presented by Citizens Energy Task Force (CETF) and other groups was denied. CETF did gain some ground as the Commission agreed to add conditions for wind—for one of the three lines (Brookings, SD to Minneapolis). With a certificate of need granted, the only additional regulatory review will be the routing for the high voltage power lines, which will impact many land owners. Eminent domain laws will allow the utilities to condemn private property and because of exceptions to the law that were granted to Public Services Corporations like utilities, landowners are at an extreme disadvantage when having to negotiate with CapX on easements for their property.

The CapX2020 projects are three massive 345 kV high voltage power lines proposed by Xcel Energy and 10 other utilities, costing nearly \$2 billion. They would reach from the Twin Cities to La Crosse, Wisconsin (La Crosse Project), the Twin Cities to Fargo, North Dakota (Fargo Project) and the Twin Cities to Brookings, South Dakota (Brookings Project). These power lines are being built to export electricity, including coal power from the Dakotas, across Minnesota to Chicago and other points east as well as to serve Minnesota load. The lines would be funded by electricity rate-payers.

“This is a disappointment for the people of Minnesota and Wisconsin,” stated Jeremy Chipps, a member of Citizens Energy Task Force who lives near the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge in La Crescent, MN. “These 15 story steel giants are not needed, could carry dirty coal from the Dakotas and would certainly harm the ecosystem. I have to question whether the Commission is a watchdog for the people protecting ratepayers, landowners and the environment or a lapdog giving the utilities whatever they want.”

CETF warns that the CapX2020 projects will create irreversible environmental harms, especially at river crossings. In particular, the La Crosse project will require a crossing of the Mississippi River within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge, impairing endangered habitats, rare and endangered species and the Mississippi River Migratory Bird Flyway. “The CapX2020 La Crosse power line will harm a federal wildlife refuge and scenic area – no matter what route is chosen,” said Jeremy Chipps, CETF member.

The US Fish and Wildlife refuge manager provided a letter to the Commissioners stating that it has become obvious that there is a tremendous amount of concern with the general public on this project, especially within communities bordering the refuge and strongly supported delaying a decision on the certificate of need.

“There are feasible alternatives to the massive CapX giants, including conservation as well as local renewable energy that can serve our local communities without doing this damage,” stated George Crocker of North American Water Office in Minneapolis. “Smart transmission development is much cheaper than building more big dumb power lines needed by central-station wind farms and coal plants, and enables much more new electrical generation capacity to come on-line quickly.”

- more -

Minnesota certificate of need law was written so that facts should matter. Based on actual energy use declines during the past two years, State regulators should have agreed to reopen the record to ensure that ratepayers don't pay for huge power lines that are not needed and cause serious adverse impacts," explained Citizens Energy Task Force attorney Paula Maccabee. "Lower forecasts of regional demand mean that smaller power lines and local energy sources can keep the lights on with less environmental harm and fewer risks to human health than the CapX2020 projects."

It is acknowledged that high voltage power lines create powerful electric and electromagnetic fields (EMF) in addition to noise, aesthetic impacts and decline in property values. The Administrative Law Judge's Report for CapX2020 found that the levels of EMF at the edge of the right-of-way were higher than those associated with a doubling of childhood leukemia in the medical literature.

"This whole process was stacked against ordinary citizens," explained Robert Johnson, a businessman serving as vice-chair of CETF. "The utilities have too much influence over the regulatory process, and then they are exempted from laws that give landowners some protection in condemnation. This decision reminds us that it's time for State agencies to serve the public interest, not just the interests of Xcel Energy and other utilities."

Citizens Energy Task Force – is a grassroots group of more than 200 citizens—and growing fast--who support clean, renewable and sustainable energy. For more information: www.cetf.us,

Media Contacts: Jeremy Chipps, CETF Member, 608-317-5700; Paula Maccabee, Attorney for CETF, 651-646-8890; Robert Johnson, CETF Vice-Chair, 651-227-7333.

* * *