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Federal utilities group to begin review of CapX2020 project

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LA CRESCENT, Minn. — The U.S. Agricultural Department's Rural Utilities Service officially has begun looking into the proposed CapX2020 high-voltage line project.

The federal agency hosted a meeting Tuesday night at La Crescent's American Legion to collect public comment and explain the review process.

The service will do a single environmental impact statement for the project, said Stephanie Strength of the RUS, which will be lead federal agency on the project.

Dairyland Power Cooperative had approached the RUS about financing its portion of the project, an estimated 11 percent, she said.

It will take at least two years to complete the federal review and make a funding decision, she said.

Dairyland first asked the agency about funding at least three years ago, said Chuck Thompson of Dairyland Power. It would take Dairyland 30 to 35 years to repay the approximately \$50 million needed.

The environmental impact statement, including comments from the meeting, likely will be completed by summer 2010, followed by a public hearing, Strength said.

Tim Carlsgaard, of CapX2020, said they have identified dual routes for the 345-kilovolt power lines along existing routes into La Crosse, Winona, Minn., or Alma, Wis., but a preferred route has not been chosen.

Also yet to be determined is where the lines would cross the Mississippi River, he said.

Lines could run along or just north of Interstate 90, then cross south into La Crescent, he said.

If the lines go into Winona, he said, the route could run through agricultural land north of I-90. The Alma route would run through farmland north of Plainview, Minn.

Jeremy Chipps, of the Citizens Energy Task Force, said the massive project isn't needed — and the group has petitioned the state to look into whether it should be built.

"The country lacks the very analytical tools to do the research to find out what our needs will even be," Chipps said.

With federal coffers now being opened to fund the project, the decreasing demand for power, as well as safer alternatives than CapX2020, should be scrutinized, he said.

Gene Semin of La Crescent Township said he supports the project, even though he already has two large power lines in front of his house.

“We’re going to need the electrical power in this country to develop our manufacturing base so that our economy can recover,” Semin said.