

Transmission Line Project Threatens National Wildlife Refuge

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Driftless Area Land Conservancy

Extensive tree removal and bulldozing to bare ground for the Cardinal-Hickory Creek (CHC) high-capacity transmission line is well underway. Landscape alteration in Iowa has progressed to the doorstep of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. The wetlands bordering the Refuge and the Refuge itself are already being threatened. The CHC project runs from the Hickory Creek substation in Dubuque County, Iowa approximately 125 miles to the Cardinal substation in Middleton, Wisconsin. On its way, CHC is slated to traverse the nationally protected Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. It then slices through the unique Driftless Area landscape of Grant, Iowa and Dane counties.

Opponents of this project deplore the fact that alternative routes that do not damage the protected Refuge were never seriously considered. Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) has been battling this project for almost five years. DALC's executive director, Jennifer Filipiak, states, "When DALC holds a conservation easement on a property, we are legally obligated to protect that property in perpetuity (forever). That doesn't mean all uses are banned forever, it simply means that any use of the land is compatible with maintaining the conservation value of the land. We rely on our conservation partners in the state and federal government to do the same. Allowing this kind of project through a national refuge, without evaluating corridors to the north or south of Refuge boundaries, opens the door for additional intrusions into a landscape that is specifically designated as a refuge from development."

Yet, despite three separate lawsuits by environmental groups and Iowa and Dane Counties, the developers are actively proceeding to move the project forward. Four environmental groups, the Driftless Area Land Conservancy, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and Defenders of Wildlife, have filed a lawsuit to block passage through the Refuge.

Additional On-Going Lawsuits

DALC had previously joined with environmental groups and municipalities to file two additional lawsuits that are on-going in the courts. In the Dane County Circuit Court, the plaintiffs claim that several aspects of the formal review process grant-



Pictured is a casement truck on the Right of Way (ROW) currently underway in Iowa. Dena Kurt photo

ing permission for the project fell short of the rule of law. At the federal level, the U.S. District Court is considering whether one or two of the Public Service Commissioners should have recused themselves from the review process.

Action Needed NOW

"A tactic used in similar projects is

to start construction on part of the route while lawsuits are still pending, then argue to the court 'You shouldn't stop us now your Honor, we've already invested a bunch of money'. So, we're asking one of the federal agencies responsible for protecting the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge to

step up NOW before the developers plow through this protected area. If not, the Refuge will be irreparably damaged and Wisconsin residents will begin to witness for themselves the ecological degradation on our side of the river," states DALC board member Mark Mittelstadt.



Pictured is row looking south on the Right of Way (ROW) currently underway in Iowa. Dena Kurt photo