

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**Proposed Construction of the Big Stone to Ellendale Transmission line across Waterfowl Management Easements in Waubay, Sand Lake, and Kulm Wetland Management Districts in South and North Dakota**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes to supply a letter of non objection to Montana-Dakota Utilities Company and Ottertail Power Company to construct a 345 kilovolt electrical power transmission line with 150-foot wide right-of-way (ROW) project across 10 unique grassland easement contracts and 37 wetland easements administered by the Service in South and North Dakota.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared which addressed multiple alternatives including a "No Action" alternative (copy attached). The EA was made available for public review in December 2015. Notification was mailed to all individuals who had attended numerous open houses and asked to be informed. Local and state government elected officials and agencies, and all tribes with interests in the affected counties were notified. Additionally notification was posted at the three Wetland Management District headquarters. A 508 compliant version was available on line.

The Preferred Alternative of construction was selected because it 1) minimized impacts to Service biological interests, 2) minimizes the impacts to cultural resources, 3) was agreeable to the State of South and North Dakota, and 4) still allows for the completion of a Midcontinent Independent System Operator project to reduce power costs to consumers.

Public acceptance of the Preferred Alternative is expected to be good because of all the public outreach that was completed. We anticipate no adverse impacts to State or Federal rare, threatened, or endangered species.

Based on my review and evaluation of the attached EA, I have determined that the impact to Service easements from this construction is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the Section 102(2) (C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, preparation of an environmental impact statement on the proposed action is not required.


Regional Director

5.18.16

Date

Attachment