

Appendix J

Agency Notification Letter Responses and General Stakeholder Correspondence

J – 1

U.S. Forest Service



North Plains Connector

USFS, BLM, Grid United Meeting Notes

October 12, 2021
2:00 PM MT
USFS/BLM Office
Dickinson, ND

General

- Southern routes preferred; north routes look problematic
- A lot of sage grouse habitat may be unoccupied in the historical range – coordinate with NDGFD
- Badlands Conservation Alliance would have interest in the project if built in the badlands
- Crossing the Little Missouri River on federally owned lands may be more challenging because of viewshed impacts
- Paleontology surveys required south of interstate 94
- ARPA permit required for archaeology and paleontology surveys
- Not aware of tribal allotment lands within North Plains Connector corridor
- ROW application will start the process

USFS

- Recommend routing in higher numbered Management Areas (generally)
- Exclude: Suitable for Wilderness (1.2A), Nonmotorized Backcountry Recreation (1.31), Research Natural Areas (2.2), Inventoried Roadless Areas (will have construction limits for roads)
- 4.22 – River and Travel Corridors will have scenic integrity issues
- If on USFS land, recommend routing in 6.1 and 3.65
- Plan considers big horn sheep
- Avoid Ponderosa Pines (only locations within ND)
- Commonly consult with Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation
- May do visual simulations at specific points on the line
 - Visual assessment done in Missoula office; may hire 3rd party.
- ROW application
 - Can have proposed routes – doesn't need a preferred route
 - Cost recovery – processed/paid before start of work
 - Authorizations, not ROW (30 year, can be renewed)
 - 3rd party contractors can speed up work and reduce cost recovery (archaeology, paleontology, wildlife/botany, visual assessment, EIS)

BLM

- New draft Resource Management Plan coming out this winter
- ROD on new plan possibly in fall 2022
- Plan will likely have sage grouse ROW avoidance in Bowman County
- ROW application
 - Requires a bond



- ROW (30 year, renewable)
- May want a 3rd party to write EIS, especially if multi-agency

Action Items

- Resource Management Plans available online
- Grid United to follow up with GIS shapefile request
- Jason Dekker – primary USFS contact for project
- Greg Morel – primary BLM contact for project
- Grid United to follow up as routes are finalized

Attachments

Attendee List

Attendee List

North Plains Connectors

USFS, BLM, Grid United

10-12-21

Misty Hays	USFS	misty.hays@usda.gov
Lindsay Churchill	MERJENT	lindsay.churchill@merjent.com
Luke Martinson	WEST mc	lmartinson@west-mc.com
Chelsie Splichal	BLM	csplichal@blm.gov
Greg Morel	BLM	gmorel@blm.gov
Jadyn Nelson	USFS	jadyn.nelson@usda.gov
Jason Dekker	USFS	jason.dekker@usda.gov
Allie Wahrenberger	Grid United	allie.wahrenberger@gridunited.com
Denisha Cummings	Grid United	denisha.cummings@gridunited.com
Brant Johnson	"	brant.johnson@gridunited.com



North Plains Connector

USFS, Grid United Meeting Notes

January 27, 2022
1:00 PM MT
Teams Meeting and USFS Office
Dickinson, ND

General

- Will need cost recovery agreement – likely a major agreement
- GU working on a revised route east of the USFS lands that would avoid more populated areas.

NEPA

- GU is applying for WAPA funding
- USFS generally a cooperating agency for WAPA
- If no WAPA funding, USFS will coordinate with BLM on who should be the lead agency
- NEPA needs to evaluate climate change, greenhouse gas analysis
- May need visual analysis from specific vantagepoints
 - Little Missouri River scenic area
 - Maah Daa Hey trail
 - Ponderosa Pine stands

Surveys/Wildlife

- USFS will defer to USFWS regarding DASK
- GU to do lek, raptor nest, ground-based field surveys
- Townsendia may be a plant species of concern
 - Check USFS GIS for known occurrences
 - Will require surveys
- USFS plant species of concern surveys only required on USFS lands
- May need to follow up with surveys in 2023
- USFS developing a 3rd party process for wildlife survey authorizations
- USFS wants to review survey plans
- USFS may require an approval process for third-party contractors; however, the process is not yet in place
- Potential wildlife mitigation:
 - Limitations on tree cutting (may include timing, quantity, or both)
 - Timing restrictions for construction
 - No surface occupancy areas for nests of some raptor species, sage grouse leks
 - Construction avoidance areas for some sensitive plants; small, isolated populations are less of an issue, as are species with a greater number of known populations
- Construction monitoring may be an option for paleontology
- Spanning may be considered avoidance for plants; more mobile species will need additional discussion (such as DASK)



- New bat/pollinator species may be listed as species of concern/threatened and endangered species

Recommendations

- Do not follow southern route alternative
 - Paleo/fossil impacts
 - Sage grouse impacts
 - USFS designations less favorable
 - Existing disturbance along the northern route
- Use a wider survey corridor through USFS lands to avoid reroute issues later; 1,000 feet is typical on USFS lands.
- Check with NDGFD regarding bighorn sheep lambing areas prior to aerial flights
- Wildfires are a concern in this area
 - Incorporate into safety planning
 - Stay away from active wildfires, during both aerial and ground surveys

Action Items

- GU to request species observation data layers through Jason
- GU to send survey plans when available

Attachments

Attendee List

Attendee List

NPC meeting
USFS DICKINSON

1/27/2022

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION</u>
Lindsay Churchill	Merjent
Leke Merhman	WEST
Jaron Dekker	USFS
Brant Johnson	Griid United
Misty Heys	USFS

Via Teams:

Maggie Voth (WEST)

John Muehlhausen (Merjent)

North Plains Connector

USFS, Grid United Meeting Notes

April 4, 2022
11:00 AM MT
Teams Meeting and USFS Office
Dickinson, ND

General Discussion

- Grid United (GU) provided a 1-page handout, business cards of GU contact, maps of USFS tracts, and a table of tracts with PLSS
- GU is incorporating feedback from landowners on the route
- GU is providing survey permission compensation
 - USFS doesn't accept survey permission compensation
 - Tenants only have forage rights, cannot accept survey permission compensation
- GU pursuing option agreements with landowners
 - Will not tie up lands in easements during permitting
 - Will execute easements once regulatory approval is received
- Wildlife survey protocols looked good, will send NTP for early wildlife surveys only
 - Other surveys will be authorized upon receipt of SF299 Application

Action Items

- GU to provide 11x17 overview map
- USFS to provide email outlining field survey NTP by discipline
- USFS will review tracts, notify GU of any discrepancies

Attendee List

Grid United: Denisha Cummings

Merjent: Lindsey Churchill

TRC: **John Ohlms**

USFS: **Misty Hays, Jason Dekker**

**Bold indicates in person, all others on Teams*



North Plains Connector

BLM, MT DEQ, USDA, USFS, Grid United Meeting Notes

May 17, 2023
2:00 PM MT
Teams Meeting

Summary

- Grid United meeting with DOE next week to discuss new MOU
 - DOE may be co-lead if there is a benefit to the project (coordinating role, no jurisdictional hook)
 - DOE is looking for projects that would be a good fit for the new program
 - GU will be getting more information on the program; will move forward with the project in the meantime
- Project goal is to procure HDVC equipment in mid-2025
 - Would like to have permit and stakeholder certainty to procure equipment, such as the ROD
- Proposed Schedule:
 - File revised SF-299 in mid-June 2023
 - Supplemental filing (ND Environmental Report) and MFSA application filed in mid-August 2023
 - Supplemental filing #2 in mid-November 2023, including:
 - Response to public comments
 - Updates to route
 - Field survey results
 - Supplemental filing #3 in January 2024, including:
 - Response to 3rd part contractor RFI
 - Impact calculations
 - Updates to route
 - Supplemental Filing #4 in November 2024, including:
 - Response to DEIS comments
- 2023 aerial lek/raptor surveys complete; USFS rare plant species underway; other on the ground field surveys to begin early June
 - Tribal survey on all lands (private and federal)
 - Field surveys only on preferred route

Agency Feedback

- BLM: Include alternative route write up in POD
- Overland travel is not a BLM term
 - Short-term access routes for construction will still need a ROW; BLM issues 3 year ROW grants
 - Term is applicable to MT DEQ for bonding to distinguish between bladed temporary access roads and non-bladed travel lanes



- DEQ: Wanted it noted that MFSA does not extend into ND
- BLM is not affirming any type of lead or co-lead status
 - Will need the revised SF-299 Form and route to determine lead agency/co-lead agencies
- BLM: Federal register process – new DTS process
 - Need to brief DOI before moving forward
 - Permanent Instruction Memorandum 2023-004
 - Can't start on federal register notice until CRA is established
- BLM: will need to determine the application is complete before we can proceed on anything or give feedback on schedule
- BLM: FAST-41 process
 - Grid United is aware of the process; DOE framework may be more helpful
 - Grid United intends to only implement a process if it benefits the agencies/project
- BLM: 2 year schedule from complete application to ROD is aggressive
 - Draft greater sage grouse plan may be coming out this summer
 - Unknown what impact that will have on this project
 - Greater sage grouse plan will be done before this project
 - Coordination efforts, tribal consultation, etc. takes time
- BLM: Agencies from DOI and USDA may have different timelines and have some different internal requirements
 - 3rd party contractor will develop and maintain detailed schedule for agencies to follow
- BLM: After receiving a complete application, start MOU and CRA
- DEQ: follow state of MT RFP process for 3rd party contractor
 - Start after MOU is put together with all parties
 - Proposes one project-specific MOU for all agencies involved
 - DEQ could draft RFP for 3rd party contractor for all agencies to review
 - DEQ can handle 3rd party contract for federal agencies/state of MT
- DEQ/BLM: 3rd party contractor to handle administrative record may be beneficial
 - GU: Explore if there are ways GU and consultants could help with administrative record as a first party
- USFS: enterprise team that could help with the application and/or administrative record
- BLM: in POD include all agencies that you would need permits from (USACE, etc.)

Action Items

- GU to submit revised SF-299 Form and POD to kick off project
- Have separate call to discuss BLM FWA and survey area
- New USFS sensitive plant – Cathy to provide

Attendee List

BLM: Beth Klempel, Eric Lepisto, Phillip Blundell

DEQ: Craig Jones

Darryl L. James Consulting: Darryl James

Grid United: Brant Johnson, Brian Dudeck, Samson Imonode

Merjent: Jeff Thommes, Lindsey Churchill

USDA: William Ross



USFS: Cathy Walsh

WEST: Maggie Voth

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Wildlife Agencies (North Dakota)



North Plains Connector

NDGFD, USFWS ES, Grid United Meeting Notes

October 13, 2021
1:00 PM CST
USFWS Office
Bismarck, ND

General

- No showstoppers at this point; encourage strategic avoidance/minimization of impacts
- Agencies appreciate early coordination, but request more details (routes, physical structures) to be able to provide more specific feedback
 - APLIC guidelines recommended as appropriate
 - Should consider locating towers outside of high quality habitat
- Private land parcels may provide high quality habitat in addition to public lands
- Greater sage-grouse and Dakota skipper were generally the biggest focus
 - Grouse – need to identify Priority Conservation Area (PCA) and native habitat
 - Skippers – habitat assessment first; range extending, need to evaluate habitat (south route is better)
- Co-location typically best option where feasible
- Questions raised on maintenance/operational impacts
 - Addressed by GU as minimal/limited in most situations
 - Restoration options something to consider
- Both agencies would be happy to participate in study plan review
 - Habitat level first, then targeted surveys as appropriate

USFWS

- Federal funding is important factor for level of involvement/consultation
- Golden eagle concerns; recommend prairie dog colony mapping
- Dakota skipper habitat
 - IPaC now has ability to map suitable habitat at a coarse scale; priority ranking with disturbed areas removed
 - Acknowledged species survey constraints; size of line, number of permitted biologists available, seasonal timing restrictions
 - Recommend habitat suitability to start
 - New guidance/recommendations for developers in process; draft winter 2021/2022
- Regal butterfly under review; something to consider in future
- Status review of bat species listings (current and future) may need to be considered (acknowledged not many trees)
- Need to evaluate migratory birds for direct/indirect impacts
 - Conservation measures to address impacts; line marking, seasonal avoidance, etc.
 - MBTA continues to evolve, needs to be on radar with potential conservation strategy
 - Consider bird strikes and reduction of habitat
- Sharp-tailed grouse in area; need to think about aerial predators



- Less USFWS easements on southern route
- Would like 2 years of data for studies to account for yearly drought/deluge conditions

NDGFD

- Grassland layer important; need to ensure GU has most up to date layer
 - Avoid high quality native grassland habitat when possible
- May be able to pass through sage-grouse core area
 - Avoid PCAs within core area
- Need to evaluate different impacts based on species/routes (grouse, sheep, elk, etc.)
- Need more specific info to provide more specific feedback
 - NDGFD will evaluate what additional data they are able to share
 - Would like to look at PLOTS lands

Action Items

- Download and/or coordinate with NDGFD to obtain the micro/macro grasslands layer
- Follow up with agencies for study plan development in winter 2021/2022
- Grid United to follow up with more specific routes and project details when available

Attachments

Attendee List

Attendee List



North Plains Connector
North Dakota Game and Fish & US Fish and Wildlife - Ecological Services Meeting

Name	Affiliation	Role	Email
Drew Becker	USFWS	USFWS	drew-becker@fws.gov
LINDSEY CHURCHILL	MERSEN+	ND permit	lindsay.churchill@merisat.com
Allie Wahrenberger	Grid United	engineering	allie.wahrenberger@gridunited.com
Brant Johnson	Grid United	Environment/Project Lead	brant.johnson@gridunited.com
Denise Cummings	Grid United	Land/Community	denise.cummings@gridunited.com
Clayton Derby	WEST	wildlife/Permitting	cl derby@west-inc.com
Luke Martensen	WEST	wildlife/Permitting	lmartensen@west-inc
Elisha Mueller	NDGF	bio	
Jesse Rolar	NDGF	upland game	
Hershi Riddle	USFWS-ES	Staff bio	

on phone

North Plains Connector

North Dakota Game and Fish Department & US Fish and Wildlife – Ecological Services Meeting

January 28, 2022

12:00 PM CST

Zoom Meeting and USFWS Office

Bismarck, ND

Attendee List

Grid United: **Brant Johnson**

WEST Inc.: **Luke Martinson**, Maggie Voth

Merjent: **Lindsey Churchill**

NDGFD: Elisha Mueller

USFWS: **Drew Becker**, Heidi Riddle

**Bold indicates in person, all others on phone*

General

- Positive response to current route (Rev 6), specifically avoidance of greater sage-grouse areas and Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs).
 - Project team acknowledged eastern section to be revised.
- Agencies requested more clarity on lead agency, specifically Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) involvement.
 - Identified federal nexus results in Section 7 consultation.
- Questions on Public Service Commission (PSC) planning and County filing timing; assume County filing/approval first, then PSC.
- General description of survey protocols shared and agency concurred that the approach is appropriate.
 - Requested written protocols are provided for review.

USFWS

- Confirmed Dakota skipper (DASK) habitat assessment first; need for presence/absence to be identified after initial surveys and planning.
 - USFWS does have DASK data, but need to figure out how to share.
- Identified a variety of species with upcoming listing decisions that should be considered due to extended project timeline.
 - Bats – 2022 and 2023
 - Pollinators – 2023
 - Fish – 2023
- Recommend whooping crane risk assessment and future planning considerations.



NDGFD

- NDGFD are confident in greater sage-grouse lek locations and track status closely.
 - Areas don't need to be specifically surveyed.
- Sharp-tailed grouse also of interest, less studied and only incidental data available.
 - Recommend sharp-tailed grouse lek surveys.
- Identified grasslands near ND/MT border as higher quality and suggest micro-siting as appropriate to minimize disturbance.
- Confirmed WEST made data request for all applicable data.
- Consider collecting waterfowl numbers in fields (eastern project extent).
- Keep PLOTs lands in mind.

Action Items

- Provide agencies survey protocols for review.
- Request DASK habitat layer from USFWS.
- Notify agencies once WAPA involvement is resolved.



NORTH PLAINS CONNECTOR

A Grid United Project

North Plains Connector Project Meeting Minutes

MEETING WITH:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services Field Office, North Dakota
North Dakota Game and Fish Department

TIME/DATE:

10 AM, December 7, 2022

LOCATION:

Bismarck, ND

ATTENDEES:

Brant Johnson – Grid United

Brian Dudeck – Grid United

Maggie Voth – Western EcoSystems Technologies (WEST)

Todd Mattson – WEST

Nick Jensen – WEST

Lindsey Churchill – Merjent

Jeff Thommes – Merjent

Elisha Mueller – North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF)

John Schumacher – NDGF

Jesse Kolar – NDGF

Drew Becker – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Heidi Riddle – USFWS

***Bold** indicates in-person attendee, all others on phone.*

PREPARED BY:

Nick Jensen - WEST

MEETING MINUTES:

Project Updates:

The meeting began with introductions and a North Plains Connector Project (Project) overview. Brant gave background on Grid United and described Project goals and route development process. Lack of eminent domain was also discussed, highlighting the importance of landowner support along the proposed Project route. Several route adjustments have been incorporated throughout the Project area since the agencies last saw the route in spring 2022, with the largest shifts in Montana. Route revisions to date have been adopted to address landowner, agency, and tribal feedback and to avoid conservation or exclusive-use easements, as well as the results of 2022 Project field surveys.

The Project status and schedule was discussed. The first year of surveys is complete, and land option acquisitions have begun on the proposed Project route. The Project is now beginning to move into the permitting phase, starting with preparation of the Montana siting permit. No lead federal agency has been confirmed; however, Bureau of Land Management is the most likely lead at this time. Drew stated USFWS' preference to apply the Endangered Species Act Section 7 or 10 process uniformly across the entire Project, rather than handling federal land private lands separately. He offered to work with the Project and lead agency on that strategy and offered to discuss the precedent for that approach in more detail.

Survey Updates:

WEST summarized the status and results of aerial and ground surveys conducted in 2022. Spring blizzards in April 2022 affected the lek survey timing, though two rounds of survey were still completed in North Dakota. New sharp-tailed grouse leks were identified in North Dakota, but no new greater sage grouse leks were identified. Raptor nest surveys identified only one bald and one golden eagle nest in North Dakota; the golden eagle nest was located on an existing transmission line lattice tower in Morton County. Year 2 aerial surveys are planned for leks in Montana only and raptor nests throughout the Project area.

Ground-based wetland/waterbody and general habitat mapping surveys were completed along 85% of the Project, and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) plant presence/absence surveys were completed (i.e., at least two visits in two different blooming windows) along 57% of USFS lands in North Dakota; all USFS lands received at least one visit in 2022. Ground-based survey findings are being compiled and will be reported in early 2023. Surveys will resume in 2023.

Special Status Species:

Special status species, including federally listed, federally protected (i.e., Migratory Bird Treaty Act or Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act species), and state species of concern (SOC) were discussed, and a list of species with the potential to occur in the Project area was confirmed. Likelihood of presence in the Project area, potential Project impacts, and preliminary conservation measures were then discussed in more detail for federally listed species.

Species-specific discussion highlights are included below. Drew offered to provide species occurrence data for federally listed species at a later date.

Whooping Crane

- Preliminary conservation measures included:
 - Avoiding construction disturbance within 1 mile if whooping cranes are sighted.
 - Further evaluation of the Project route to identify optimal locations for line marker installation.
- Heidi agreed to provide contact information to obtain HAPET whooping crane habitat models.
 - HAPET model can be utilized to identify line marking locations

Northern Long-eared Bat and Little Brown Bat

- Heidi mentioned that the endangered uplisting for northern long-eared bat will go into effect on January 30, 2023. USFWS will also publish an updated determination key that should provide insight regarding consultation for that species.
- Preliminary conservation measures for both species included avoidance of tree felling, tree trimming, and bridge work during the active bat season (April 1 to October 31).
 - Todd asked if the Project may be able to narrow the felling restriction (e.g., to May 15 – August 15), since no hibernacula are known within the Project area; however, USFWS said bats are not well studied in North Dakota and Drew was not confident they have enough data to support less restrictive dates.
 - Given the lack of state-specific information, restriction dates provided in the January 30, 2023 guidance will likely be recommended. If that window for tree

felling is too broad, narrowing the applicable locations to riparian corridors may be an alternative for future discussion.

Dakota skipper (DASK)

- Drew reiterated the USFWS goal to avoid and minimize impacts to suitable habitat and especially the DASK themselves. Suitable habitat is not limited to high quality grasslands, as DASK adults can use low-quality (including weedy) habitat for foraging.
- USFWS mentioned that surveys in 2021 or 2022 may have found DASK closer to the Project than the published 2018 survey protocol map would suggest. They also cautioned against putting too much weight on occurrence data, since that reflects where surveys have been conducted but not necessarily the limits of species presence.
- The species has a narrow flight and reproductive window and impacts during that period should be avoided.
- Elisha stated that any ground-disturbing activity in unbroken grasslands would be considered a permanent impact and should be avoided.
- Todd highlighted that the Project crosses a lot of grassland, so construction timing restrictions may be a concern, and should be discussed in more detail.
- Drew mentioned it is possible DASK impacts may be discountable altogether, but USFWS would want a focused conversation to better understand the extent of Project impacts and to discuss how to handle DASK consultation. This conversation would also guide the USFWS recommendations for 2023 field surveys.
- Drew confirmed the published range map would be appropriate to use for more focused DASK surveys in 2023, but also noted that DASK range may occur further west than the current range map shows; WEST will check for range map updates. Drew suggested surveys should include a 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) buffer where the Project is near occupied DASK habitat.

Bald and Golden Eagles and Migratory Birds

- John recommended a 0.5 mile construction disturbance buffer around an eagle nest, but Drew noted there may be differences between federal and state eagle guidance. Work with them (USFWS) to avoid the need for a permit.
- The golden eagle nest on the existing tower may be removed by the tower owner. Todd said nest removal may be easiest option to limit bird electrocution risk and associated operational costs.
- USFWS recommended working with the Migratory Bird Office to navigate eagle permitting, but noted the workload concerns and permitting backlog. Heidi agreed to provide an initial contact.
- Work with Migratory Bird Office for Migratory Bird Treaty Act concerns and permits (once available)
 - Heidi noted that preliminary conservation measures looks good for migratory birds

Other State Concerns

- PLOTS lands include easements worked out between NDGF and the landowners. Those agreements are all different, and some agreements would likely be invalidated by the

Project crossing. The Project should coordinate further on PLOTS crossings to assist landowners in understanding the impacts to any existing easements.

- John suggested adding white-tailed deer to the big game species list for North Dakota, and also noted that moose are likely only a concern on the eastern portion of the Project.
- John reiterated that most ND SOC are associated with native grasslands, so those habitats affect multiple species and the Project's main impact, from NDGF's perspective.
- Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is currently adjacent to the Project. NDGF recommends applying a 0.25-mile buffer to avoid construction impacts to the WMA. John recommends marking the line near the WMA (due to raptors using the slopes for hunting) and near the Heart River.

ACTION ITEMS:

WEST

- Follow-up with Drew on Section 7 strategy precedents.
- Provide grouse lek and raptor data and reports to agencies in early 2023.
- Calculate potential Project impacts on DASK and native grasslands in early 2023 to inform discussions on 2023 survey needs with USFWS.
 - WEST will schedule a follow-up meeting with USFWS to focus on DASK survey and consultation.
- Add white-tailed deer to the big game Species of Concern list.
- Evaluate a potential avoidance buffer for Otter Creek WMA.

USFWS

- Heidi to provide contact information for the HAPET whooping crane models and the Migratory Bird Office.
- Drew to provide other federal species occurrence data in future meetings.

ATTACHMENTS:

None



North Plains Connector

USFWS, Grid United Meeting Notes

June 6, 2023
1:30 PM Central
Teams Meeting

Summary of Bat Survey Discussion

- Adjustments made to study plan regarding staff
- Acoustic locations are hybrid of suitable summer habitat and locations we expect to survey this summer
- Have quantified kilometer segments with habitat where we would survey, and those without habitat where we would not survey
- Added section to study plan to conduct desktop review of winter habitat
- Would prefer to not do telemetry at this time
 - May do later on in the project at specific sites
 - Challenges particularly in MT with lack of public roads to triangulate roost trees
 - Not using mist netting to disregard acoustics
 - Not presence/absence level of effort
 - Telemetry is incredibly labor intensive
 - Not included in Guidelines
- Will do tissue collection if USFWS can approve in permits
 - Requesting project-specific approval from field office for tissue collection
- Will have staff with experience in ID of western Myotis, NLEB
- Reviewed study plan comments and how WEST plans to address
- WEST generally has two acoustic reviewers; will review all bats IDed as NLEB, tricolor bat, LBB
- Will be using two types of software for acoustic ID outside of the range where software has been approved
 - Per the Guidelines
- Hoping to start acoustic surveys tomorrow, pending approval

Agency Feedback on Bat Discussion

- Would like to see forested summer habitat polygons with items referenced in the Guidelines; nothing fancy; add to revised survey plan
- Quickly reviewed KMZ, looked ok so far
 - KMZ helped clear up question on how kilometer segments were determined in survey plan
- Summary of assessment findings would be number of kilometers with habitat and number without habitat
 - Maps of segments attached that have summer habitat where surveys will occur; can exclude kilometer segments with no survey in the map book
 - Maps can show a larger scale to reduce number of map book pages
- State of MT does have an abandoned mines GIS layer to use for desktop review



- Not aware of hibernacula near the project
- Contact Robert for getting Brenna permitted in MT
- Bats may travel less than a mile from mist-net sites
 - Telemetry would be appreciated since data are lacking in the region
 - Can add subject to land access
 - Requesting it for consultation
 - May limit telemetry to 3 NLEB in each state
- Can provide ID key
- Recommend sending guano samples for ID
- Add tissue collection to survey plan (condition on if approved)
- Can adjust survey plan based on NLEB range (roughly Rosebud Creek to the east); however, may not exclude due to future uplisting of little brown bat
- Would like more manual vetting of acoustic calls to eliminate false negatives
 - Some false negatives have been classified as myotis and evotis
- Not requesting CV of mist net staff
- Will not authorize acoustic surveys without updated survey plan
 - May send updated acoustic survey plan with KMZ (without the maps) to authorize that survey (note there will be a follow up addendum)
 - Follow up with maps and updates to mist net survey plan as an addendum

Summary of DASK Discussion (H. Riddle, M. Voth, L. Churchill only)

- Would like specific conservation measures for reproductive vs foraging habitat
- TOYR during flight period for foraging habitat
- Trying to avoid reproductive habitat
- Reproductive and foraging habitat may overlap, would classify as reproductive habitat where applicable
- Four habitat types defined: unsuitable, dispersal, suitable habitat as reproductive or forage
- Will have polygons of habitat types
- Survey will inform BA
- If reproductive habitat cannot be avoided, will have site-specific conservation measures, may require formal consultation
- DASK model may be useful for mitigation efforts as opposed to Section 7 consultation
- May need to collaborate more on where to assume DASK presence
 - If we are assuming no presence, then USFWS would want it well documented in the BA

Action Items

- Send contact/info on tissue collection
- NPC team will discuss internally adding telemetry to the survey plan and get back to USFWS
- Revise Larisa Bishop-Boros CV to highlight western experience in bat ID
- WEST will send revised survey plan per notes above
- USFWS will try to quickly approve the acoustic surveys
- Heidi to follow up with DASK survey data

Attendee List

USFWS: Mike McGrath, Heidi Riddle, Jeff Berglund, Jake Martin



WEST: Maggie Voth, Richard Novy, Brenna Hyzy, Curtis

Merjent: Lindsey Churchill



North Plains Connector

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Bismarck Ecological Services Field Office and North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD), Grid United

Meeting Notes

February 16, 2024
12:30 PM Central
Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- Project Updates
 - Route changes
 - Reduction in number and magnitude of route changes over time; reroutes in 2022 smaller than 2023
 - Route changes were adopted to avoid sensitive areas (per field survey results) and exclusive easements, or to accommodate landowner requests during land acquisition
 - Acquisition
 - Approx. 69% of options on private landowners acquired
 - Approx. 11% of the route crosses state/federal lands
 - Private lands should reach 100% in Q2 2024
 - Schedule updates were provided for major federal and state permits
- 2023 Survey Results
 - Raptor surveys
 - Followed same methods as 2022 surveys, but with a 500 ft avoidance buffer around buildings
 - 48 total raptor nests, including 42 nests consistent in size and structure with an eagle nest
 - 3 active great blue heronries (1 in North Dakota)
 - Wetland/waterbody and general habitat mapping surveys
 - Followed same methods as 2022 surveys
 - Approximately 89% complete, will resume in 2024
 - Dakota skipper (DASK) reproductive and foraging habitat surveys
 - New in 2023
 - Surveyed potentially suitable habitat in Fallon County in Montana and all of North Dakota, based on results from general habitat mapping surveys and USFWS DASK habitat suitability model
 - Approximately 56% complete, will resume in 2024
 - Bat surveys
 - New in 2023; included acoustic presence/probable absence (P/A) survey, mist netting survey, and hibernacula assessments



- Surveys followed the 2023 USFWS *Range-wide Indiana bat and Northern Long-eared Bat Survey Guidelines*
- Acoustic P/A surveys
 - Little brown bats were detected Projectwide
 - Northern long-eared bats were detected in North Dakota
 - No tricolored bats were detected
- Mist net surveys
 - Captured little brown bats in both North Dakota and Montana
 - No northern long-eared bats or tricolored bats captured
- Hibernacula assessment identified two locations as potentially suitable in Montana
- More detailed species discussions
 - Whooping crane
 - Project is within migration corridor in North Dakota only (~209 mi within 95% corridor)
 - Potential impacts
 - Calculated cumulative risk of fatalities over 50 years:
 - 0.333 cranes without bird flight diverters
 - 0.166 cranes with bird flight diverters
 - Project conservation measures
 - Planning to install approved bird flight diverters within 95% migration corridor
 - Avoid construction disturbance within 1 mile of cranes, when present
 - Lower or mark equipment over 15 feet tall when not in use
 - Agency feedback on whooping crane
 - H. Riddle (USFWS) asked about line marking
 - WEST confirmed that the line will be marked within the whole 95% band of the migration corridor (mid-Slope County through Oliver and Morton Counties) and that marking would not be limited to within 1 mi of suitable habitat
 - H. Riddle would like to discuss internally and get back to WEST to confirm line marking recommendations, namely the Region 6 guidelines' recommendation to mark within a mile of suitable habitat and then to mark an equal amount of existing line within the corridor
 - M. Voth (WEST) noted that Grid United is a developer and does not own existing lines within this area, which makes that recommendation difficult to fulfill
 - Per H. Riddle, this issue has come up before, and it is a known limitation; some companies work with other utilities to implement line marking on existing lines, which may be an option for Grid United
 - Bats (northern long-eared bat [NLEB] and little brown bat)
 - Potential to occur Projectwide
 - Summer habitat (forested areas)
 - Potential impact areas
 - Approx. 148 acres in Montana and 50 acres in North Dakota
 - Acreage would increase if shrub/scrub is considered potential habitat
 - Project conservation measures
 - Adhere to time-of-year-restriction (TOYR) for tree trimming or felling and bridge repair, retrofit, or maintenance activities within 3 miles of NLEB detections (TOYR windows differ by state)



- Potential risks of adults (avoidance) and larvae (crushing)
- Project conservation measures
 - Adjustments to temporary construction work areas and permanent infrastructure have been made to minimize impacts to DASK
 - Minimize herbicide and pesticide use within reproductive and foraging habitats
 - Within DASK reproductive habitats, restore vegetation cover with weed-free seed mix with high forb-to-grass ratio
 - Control noxious weeds
 - In Oliver and Morton counties - avoid construction in reproductive habitat during the adult flight period (June 10 to July 25)
- Agency feedback on DASK
 - L. Toso (USFWS) agreed with DASK conservation measures regarding TOYR on construction
 - Noted this could be eliminated if P/A surveys determined DASK were not present
 - M. Voth concerned about level-of-effort for P/A surveys; L. Toso said USFWS would work with WEST and Grid United to limit the scope and focus on surveys within larger contiguous grassland habitat rather than each habitat patch
 - In areas surveyed, can implement minimization and avoidance measures, then compare pre- and post-construction surveys
 - M. Voth asked if P/A surveys could be used as a conservation measure instead of as a pre-construction measure, and asked if there was an acreage threshold for wanting to see occupancy in addition to the ongoing habitat surveys?
 - L. Toso responded that context of landscape is more important than acreage
 - A "big" patch is connected to a larger landscape of grassland, and has a higher probability of supporting DASK; USFWS would like to confirm DASK presence in those areas
 - Other isolated pieces of grassland have a lower potential to support a DASK population
 - USFWS would be willing to discuss while looking at maps of the area to identify potential survey areas
 - M. Voth asked if there was a path forward without P/A surveys, if we assume presence in reproductive habitat in Oliver and Morton Counties
 - L. Toso said it would be tougher to quantify impacts in the BO without P/A data, and USFWS prefers that level of detail, but there would be a path forward without it
 - L. Toso - Would be a path forward with P/A surveys if the surveys were targeted?
 - M. Voth said we will need to discuss internally and would need to know the magnitude of effort: number of sites, years, and availability of surveyors, given the limited number of permitted surveyors
 - USFWS mention that a separate call would be good discuss this further; WEST will set this up
 - L. Churchill asked if P/A surveys expire within a certain time frame?



- WEST will schedule a follow up call to discuss DASK P/A surveys with USFWS
- E. Mueller will send contact information for NDGFD Private Lands Initiative contacts
- H. Riddle will send contact information for refuge contact

Attendee List

USFWS: Luke Toso, Heidi Riddle

NDGFD: Elisha Mueller

DOE: Tim Langer

Grid United: DJ Worth, Toya Campbell

WEST: Maggie Voth, Kara Hemy-Meyer, Kristy Brightwell

Merjent: Jeff Thommes, Lindsey Churchill



North Plains Connector

**US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Department of Energy (DOE),
Grid United (GU), Western EcoSystems Technology, Inc. (WEST),
Merjent**

Meeting Notes

July 11, 2024
3:00 PM Central
Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- North Plains Connector (Project) updates
 - NEPA schedule
 - Original nest surveys were conducted in 2022 and 2023; no new Project eagle nest surveys were conducted in 2024
 - Additional preconstruction eagle nest surveys are planned for the breeding season prior to construction (likely 2028)
- Recap of previous discussion in August 2023
 - GU anticipates a nest disturbance permit only; no nests would be physically removed during Project construction
 - S. Hebert: will maintain independent NEPA assessment for issuing any eagle incidental take permits; the USFWS will assess whether project falls into an EA or CATEX level of review based on the 2024 Eagle Rule; will depend on how 2028 survey results look
 - Generally still expected to be a shorter process
 - S. Hebert: still anticipates one disturbance permit may be issued to cover multiple nests
- Discussed outstanding questions from the 2023 meeting
 - S. Hebert: confirmed that 0.5-mile buffer for blasting applies to GOEA as well as BAEA
 - S. Hebert: confirmed the overall proposed development, planning, and contents of the Eagle Management Plan (EMP); usually call the document an Eagle Conservation Plan (ECP); please include S. Hebert and Anna Joy Lehmicke when providing the ECP so USFWS can consolidate comments.
 - J. Berglund: requested the field offices also be included in communications
- NEPA analysis
 - S. Hebert: is comfortable including unknown, future nests that may be encountered during construction in the analysis; timing is up to the applicant, a significant route change will start over the process for USFWS; the disturbance permit may fall under a CATEX per the 2024 Eagle Rule, but need to confirm
 - S. Hebert: are the facilities powering the line considered as part of the Project to be included in the DOE's EIS?
 - J. Kuba: the Project would connect the US eastern and western transmission line grids, could transport power in either direction along the line depending on demand, and will be open to all sources of electrical power generation; the DOE



- is ultimately responsible for the EIS being prepared for the larger project, but generation facilities will not likely be specifically included in the EIS
 - S. Hebert: still looking at less than a year for an EA that might be needed for an eagle disturbance permit; prefer to come in with as close to a final route as possible
 - M. Voth: some of the design needs to progress to get answers on final blasting locations and time of construction
 - J. Kuba/R. Davis: construction is planned to generally start in 2028; geotechnical survey in 2025/2026 prior to construction
 - S. Hebert: USFWS is receiving variance requests during construction on another project; what is GU anticipating?
 - J. Kuba: flexibility during construction is ideal; would like some sort of flexibility either through a variance process or a bounded analysis that allows for a certain level of disturbance up front
 - S. Hebert: would rather overestimate than underestimate to make sure the Project is in compliance with any eagle disturbance permit conditions; understands that we still want to keep the estimate reasonable
 - Communication and documentation will be important to document why the permit application has more nests compared to the final NEPA document; having fewer nests in the permit than in NEPA would likely be a simpler approach.
 - J. Kuba: could new nests during construction possibly be considered separately under a new CATEX?
 - S. Hebert: would need to ask others at USFWS if this is an option
- Permitting and mitigation timeline
- Nest disturbance permit
 - M. Voth: will refine information on where blasting will occur, helicopter use, time of year restrictions, etc. in the permit application
 - M. Voth: timing of mitigation payments?
 - S. Hebert: timing can be negotiated, but should be prior to disturbance happening
 - J. Kuba: Project construction can be delayed or cancelled so payment would ideally not be too far in advance of disturbance
 - T. Mattson: without amending the permit, could the mitigation be adjusted to align with what disturbance happens during construction?
 - S. Hebert: this is not typical of other projects
 - S. Hebert: if you reduce your disturbance, then your mitigation payment would be reduced in suit, but need to confirm with others at USFWS
 - J. Berglund: still using in lieu fee program for mitigation?
 - M. Voth: yes
 - J. Berglund: in lieu fee programs can be more flexible than other options
- Nest evaluation
 - C. Foo provided an overview of the detailed nest evaluation
 - S. Hebert: helicopter flight should be considered for disturbance as well
 - C. Foo: currently plans to avoid nest disturbance by helicopters
 - J. Berglund: you mentioned the 1 km buffer distance in MT, will that be used?
 - C. Foo: plan to include the MT-specific distance in the permit
 - J. Berglund: can you confirm that the unidentified raptor nests in the spreadsheet are considered potentially eagle nests?
 - M. Voth: yes, that is correct



Next Steps/Action Items

- Grid United to set up a call with the USFWS eagle permitting staff
- J. Berglund: thoughts on timing of draft Eagle Management Plan?
 - M. Voth: working on broader MBTA document, which includes eagles, so the eagle-specific information will be pulled into the EMP/ECP; draft expected early next year

Attendee List

USFWS: Jeff Berglund, Stephanie Hebert, Jacob Martin, Luke Toso

DOE: Mike Prowatzke

Grid United: Ryan Davis, John Kuba

WEST: Cecily Foo, Todd Mattson, Maggie Voth

Merjent: Lindsey Churchill



North Plains Connector

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Bismarck and Helena Ecological Services Field Offices

Meeting Notes

August 19, 2024
4:00 PM Central
Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- Project Overview
 - WEST provided a brief overview of the North Plains Connector Project (Project) and Project timeline.
 - USFWS asked if there were studies supporting the Project need from each regional transmission organization.
 - Per Grid United (GU), interconnection studies are underway, but the Project is early in that process.
 - USFWS asked if there will be ancillary updates needed at the existing substations or energy generators to accommodate the Project.
 - Luke (USFWS) clarified that USFWS will need to understand cumulative effects of the Project, including those arising from the Project.
 - GU will take that into account.
- Whooping Crane (WHCR) Overview
 - Montana:
 - Project is outside the WHCR migration corridor; documented presence in Project counties is historic.
 - North Dakota:
 - Project crosses the 95%, 75%, and 50% migration corridors.
 - There are recent WHCR sightings in eBird, the closest is within 6 km of the Project in Morton County. The next closest are along the Missouri River.
 - USFWS confirmed the ranges.
 - For North Dakota, Luke recommended using the Niemuth Model.
 - For Montana, USFWS said that Montana Natural Heritage Program maintains the occurrence records; WEST confirmed that that was our source, so the data is current.
- Potential Impacts
 - Limited to North Dakota, based on the migration corridor and lack of sightings in Montana.
 - Collision Mortality Modeling
 - Incidence of WHCR collision with power lines is low.
 - Used USFWS Reasonably Certain Knowledge (RCK) model, with some modifications, including updated migration mortality numbers.



- RCK model assumed mortality during migration of approx. 5 cranes/year.
- WEST revised this to approx. 4 cranes/year, based on more recent telemetry data.
- Proportion of mortality from transmission lines:
 - 27 documented fatalities total from 1952-2023
 - Of those, 2 known transmission line, 5 distribution line, 1 unknown power line, 1 unknown cause of death with trauma that could have been from a power line
 - Adjusted transmission line mortalities = 2.37, rounded to 3
 - Calculated proportion of annual mortality due to transmission line collision:
 - Roughly 0.5 cranes die during migration each year from transmission lines.
- Project-specific calculated mortality due to collisions per year:
 - With no bird flight diverters (BFDs) – 0.002 crane/year
 - With BFDs (50% effectiveness) – 0.001 crane/year
- Cumulative mortality
 - Model accounts for population growth.
 - RCK model – assumed 4% growth per year
 - WEST adjustment – more recently published Population Viability Analysis cyclic projections
 - Calculated cumulative Project-specific mortality (50-year Project life):
 - No BFDs = 0.453 crane
 - With BFDs (nearly all of North Dakota) = 0.227 crane
- Collision mortality model discussion:
 - USFWS – asked for a summary of how the RCK model was modified.
 - WEST revisions included:
 - Reducing the crane migration days in the U.S. (based on Baasch et al. 2019)
 - Focusing on transmission lines and adjusting for uncertainty (unknowns) for mortality rate calculations
 - Using a cyclic population growth estimate for WHCR
 - USFWS asked for additional information on why we excluded distribution lines and what the effect of removing distribution lines would have on the mortality calculations.
 - While distribution line mortalities played a role in the analyses, the Project is a transmission line, and the analysis was intended to quantify Project-specific impacts.
 - Distribution lines have smaller conductor bundles that are less visible than transmission lines, particularly large transmission lines, so a different risk profile to WHCR.
 - Confirmed that the length of the Project route in North Dakota is 239 miles, which is what was used in the model (and includes area west of migration corridor to be conservative with estimates).



- Stopover Habitat Suitability – Probability of WHCR Use
 - Focused on Niemuth et al. (2018) model, which maps probability of WHCR habitat use in North and South Dakota and was validated with WHCR occurrence data.
 - Project Assessment Areas included:
 - Project Limits-of-Disturbance (LOD) = Temporary and permanent workspaces, plus the operational right-of-way.
 - Areas where physical habitat removal or alteration are possible.
 - Action Area (AA) = 2.7-km buffer on LOD
 - Buffer size determined by noise, which is calculated based on typical construction equipment noise levels and the distance to ambient background sound.
 - AA Adjacent Habitat = 20-km buffer, excluding the AA
 - Provides a comparison of available habitat outside the AA.
 - Infrastructure Avoidance Area (IAA) – 2-km transmission centerline buffer
 - Cranes may avoid transmission lines in non-drought conditions (Ellis et al., 2022)
 - IAA Adjacent Habitat – 20-km buffer, excluding the IAA
 - Provides a comparison of available habitat outside the IAA.
 - Niemuth Model Probability of use within assessment areas:
 - Highest probability of use within Project areas (LOD, AA, IAA) was approximately 10%.
 - Probability of use in AA/IAA Adjacent Habitats was much higher (up to approx. 53%).
 - Probability of use increases west to east, as expected
 - WHCRs are more likely to use AA/IAA Adjacent Habitats, rather than Project areas (LOD, AA, IAA).
 - Stopover habitat suitability discussion:
 - USFWS asked if the buffers included all Project components, and if changes to existing generator operation were anticipated.
 - Laurel (USFWS) noted to consider whether there could be potential transmission network upgrades as a result of the Project, including new lines and upgrades of existing lines as components that should be pulled into an AA, depending on the Project specifics.
 - The Project should consider what falls under the “but for” and “reasonably certain to occur” umbrellas for the ESA when considering the extent and connectedness of Project construction to changes to the transmission network.
- Proposed Conservation Measures
 - Install BFD in North Dakota on overhead shield wires (mileage/locations TBD)
 - Stop work if cranes are sighted within 1 mile during construction.
 - Lower or mark equipment over 15 feet tall for visibility when not in use.
 - Jeff B. (USFWS MT) – recommends marking line where there are other concentrations of birds, per APLIC guidance (areas such as larger rivers, migratory areas, etc.).
 - BFDs will be discussed in the Project MBTA Compliance Plan, which will be provided for review in the spring.



- Project will develop an Avial Protection Plan for operations, as well.
 - Project will work with USFWS to identify criteria for line marking.
 - USFWS asked about the regional recommendation to mark an equal amount of transmission lines outside of the Project, and mentioned that WAPA maintains a map of unmarked lines that could be used to identify mitigation options.
 - The spirit of this recommendation is to offset overall habitat degradation and indirect effects to WHCR.
 - WEST asked how the “equal amount” is determined and what it is calculated from?
 - USFWS has a document that would provide more guidance, and this can be discussed in great detail.
 - GU added that the Project determination should not hinge on needing to provide an equal amount of line marking on other projects, since they are beyond the Project’s influence and control.
- Impact Summary
 - Given very low collision risk with BFD installation and low likelihood of habitat use within the AA, preliminary determination is not likely to adversely affect (NLAA).
 - USFWS feedback:
 - NLAA seems reasonable and supported based on data presented.
 - USFWS would like to see the complete Project description before making a final determination.
- Other questions:
 - USFWS - Is NPC considering habitat offsets?
 - Projected impacts due to collision are low and habitat within in the IAA and AA have less than a 10% probability of use, so offsets are not currently planned.

Action Items

- USFWS to send additional guidance regarding how the Region 6 WHCR recommendations are calculated and applied, including how suitable habitat is determined and where BFDs should be placed.

Attendee List

ND USFWS: Luke Toso, Hanna Edens, Laurel Hill (Region 6 Energy Coordinator)

MT USFWS: Jeff Berglund

DOE: Michael Prowatzke

Grid United: Brant Johnson, Ryan Davis, John Kuba, Odaro Omusi

Merjent: Lindsey Churchill, Jeff Thommes

WEST: Maggie Voth, Kristy Brightwell, Kara Hempy-Mayer



North Plains Connector

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Montana and North Dakota Ecological Services Field Offices; Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP); North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD); Grid United

Meeting Notes

December 19, 2024
3:00 PM CST
Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- Project Updates
 - Private land options are almost fully acquired and on target for completion in Q1 2025.
 - Summarized NEPA/MEPA status and fall activities, including:
 - Submission of the Resource Reports and MFSA Application (August and September),
 - Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS (October),
 - Public scoping meetings (November), and
 - Public comment period (closed December).
 - Schedule updates were provided for biological permitting and major milestones for the NEPA process.
- 2024 Survey Results
 - Overview:
 - 3rd year of survey for USFS plant surveys, wetland/waterbodies surveys and general habitat mapping.
 - 2nd year for Dakota skipper (DASK) habitat and bat presence/probable absence (P/A) surveys.
 - Repeat surveys followed methods consistent with surveys in 2022 and/or 2023.
 - New surveys in 2024 included DASK P/A and bat roadside (talus slope and hibernacula) assessment surveys.
 - USFS Plant Surveys
 - Consistent methods, same as 2022-2023.
 - Found 29 new Hooker's Townsend-daisy occurrences in 2024; also found occurrences in 2022 and 2023.
 - Mapped suitable habitat for 7 of the 13 sensitive species.
 - Surveys are 99% complete.
 - Wetland/Waterbody Surveys
 - Summarized results to date.
 - Observed wetlands are primarily emergent.
 - Surveys are 99% complete.



- General Habitat Surveys
 - Results to date include:
 - 99 tracts with milkweed and 2 tracts with violets, both of which provide larval host habitat for butterflies proposed for federal listing
 - 41 prairie dog colonies
 - 708 weed patch occurrences, over 2,000 acres of state-listed noxious weeds (13 species)
 - Incidental wildlife observations such as bobolink, burrowing owl, and northern leopard frog
 - Surveys are 99% complete.
- DASK Habitat Surveys
 - Results to date:
 - 717 acres of reproductive habitat
 - 65 acres of foraging habitat
 - Surveys are 98% complete.
- DASK P/A Surveys
 - These were new surveys initiated in 2024 and conducted during the DASK flight window from June 25 to July 14.
 - Surveyed 5 areas twice, and 2 areas three times due to challenging weather.
 - Lone male DASK recorded in Morton County.
 - Incidental finding during habitat surveys.
 - No additional DASK found during return visits for P/A surveys.
 - This is the first recorded DASK occurrence in Morton County.
 - 40 butterfly species recorded at P/A sites, including western regal fritillary and monarch.
 - Year 2 surveys planned for 2025 within a subset of the Year 1 survey areas (excluding Slope County).
 - Agency feedback:
 - USFWS asked if the Project plans to conduct targeted surveys for western regal fritillary and/or monarch? Also asked about evaluating habitat suitability for these species.
 - WEST responded that habitat for monarch is very common and wide-spread, particularly in North Dakota, so occupancy survey is of limited use. Western regal fritillaries are also common in North Dakota, but could be discussed further.
 - Biological Assessment (BA) impact assessment discussion:
 - Incidental occurrence will be buffered by 1 kilometer and considered known occupied habitat in the BA.
 - Will designate unoccupied habitat as “likely absent” if no DASK are recorded in 2025.
 - Discussed revised conservation measures for DASK, as well as measures for monarch and fritillary.
- Bat Surveys
 - Acoustic P/A surveys
 - No northern long-eared bats were detected in 2024.
 - Little brown bats were detected Project wide.
 - Tricolored bat was detected at one site in Fallon County, Montana.



- This detection is an oddity:
 - First record in Montana, outside known species range.
 - One call that could be tricolored bat and could not be reclassified to a more likely species.
- Reviewed independently by four WEST analysts and one external third-party analyst.
- More coordination with FWS discussed.
 - Surveys are 98% complete.
- Hibernacula assessment
 - Identified one new potentially suitable cave during field surveys in North Dakota.
 - Spring emergence P/A surveys in 2025 at this location and 2 locations identified in Montana in 2023.
- Roadside assessment (talus slopes/hibernacula)
 - New in 2024; identified 26 locations along Project route that have rocky outcrop habitat within 0.5-mile of the Project.
 - Many of the survey areas could not be viewed from public roads.
- Discussed revised conservation measures for northern long-eared bats and tricolored bats.
- Agency feedback on bats
 - USFWS requested all full-spectrum calls recorded at the location and on the night of the tricolored bat call in question.

Action Items

- WEST will compile and send the requested full-spectrum tricolored bat call to USFWS.

Attendee List

USFWS – Montana: Jake Martin, Jeff Berglund, Mike McGrath
USFWS – North Dakota: Luke Toso, Hannah Edens, Nicole MacPhee
MFWP: Brett Dorak, Amanda Hall, Cory Allred, Ella Engelhard, Steve Atwood
NDGFD: Elisha Mueller
DOE: Kirsten Christopherson, RJ Boyle
Grid United: John Kuba, Ryan Davis, DJ Worth, Odaro Omusi
WEST: Maggie Voth, Brenna Hyzy
Merjent: Jeff Thommes, Lindsey Churchill



January 23, 2025

Donnie Joe Worth
Project Development Director
Grid United
712 Main Street, Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Mr. Worth:

RE: Proposed North Plains Connector Project

North Plains Connector LLC is planning to construct and operate an interregional transmission line project extending between Rosebud County, Montana and Oliver and Morton Counties, North Dakota. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department (Department) has reviewed this project for wildlife concerns.

A primary concern is the possible disturbance of native prairie associated with construction of the transmission line and associated access roads. Avoidance of native prairie areas reduces impacts to a number of grassland species including many of the species of conservation priority. We request that work within these areas be avoided by siting structures, roads, and other infrastructure on previously disturbed lands to the extent possible. Large, contiguous tracts of native habitat should not be fragmented, and disturbed areas reclaimed to pre-project conditions.

The National Wetland Inventory indicates a variety of wetlands within the proposed project corridor. Steps should be taken to protect any wetlands that cannot be avoided, no alterations should be made to existing drainage patterns, and above-ground appurtenances should not be placed in wetland areas. Unavoidable destruction or degradation of wetland acres should be mitigated in kind.

The project route appears to cross several Classified fisheries including the Heart River, Cannonball River, and Little Missouri River. We recommend that overhead lines be marked when placed over perennial streams or sited in close proximity to large wetland complexes to minimize possible avian impacts. The publication "Reducing Avian Collisions with Power Lines: the State of the Art in 2012" provides a range of management options which can be used to reduce avian losses.

The Department manages several Wildlife Management Areas located in or adjacent to the project study area: <https://gf.nd.gov/wma-listing>. A special use permit could be required for this project if construction activities would impact these lands. Mr. Kent Luttschwager, Wildlife Resource Management Section Leader, can be contacted at 701-774-2780 for additional information on permit requirements.

Governor
Kelly Armstrong

Director
Jeb Williams

Deputy Director
Scott A. Peterson

Structure siting should be avoided in nesting habitat within a 1-mile buffer of any prairie grouse lek, and construction within these buffer zones restricted during the lekking and nesting seasons (March 15-July 15). Mr. Jesse Kolar, Upland Game Management Supervisor, can be contacted at 701-690-5711 for additional information regarding best management practices for prairie grouse.

We recommend that surveys be conducted for raptor nests before construction begins, and a construction buffer be implemented around active eagle nest sites as determined by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's eagle management guidelines. Ms. Sandra Johnson, Conservation Biologist, can be contacted at 701-328-6382 for additional information on eagle sites in the state.

We do not believe this project will have significant adverse effects on wildlife or wildlife habitat, including species of conservation priority, provided these recommendations are implemented where appropriate.

Sincerely,



Bruce Kreft
Chief
Conservation & Communications Division

Governor
Kelly Armstrong

Director
Jeb Williams

Deputy Director
Scott A. Peterson

From: [Kristy Brightwell](#)
To: [Amber Address \(External User\)](#); donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com; hanna_edens@fws.gov; jacob_martin@fws.gov; [Jeff Thommes](#); jeff_berglund@fws.gov; [John Kuba](#); [Kara Hempy-Mayer](#); [Lindsey Churchill](#); [Luke Toso](#); mike_mcgrath@fws.gov; [MVoth](#); [Ryan Davis](#)
Cc: [Chris Swanson](#); [Karen Tyrell](#); [Kirsten Christopherson](#)
Subject: EXTERNAL: Re: NPC Biological Assessment Meeting
Date: Wednesday, March 19, 2025 7:19:55 AM
Attachments: [C2_signature_west_finalupdatedgreen_7907b6f8-1817-487e-a86a-bbeaa461a443.png](#)
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[C2_signature_linkedin_westgreen-01_839a39bf-ccc8-4e2c-b31e-1ae5c79d2aae.png](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Merjent.

Hello all,

The agenda for tomorrow's meeting is as follows:

- Introductions
- Project Background/Updates
- Biological Assessment Status and Schedule
- Section 7 Consultation Process
- Species Addressed in the Biological Assessment
 - Potential to Occur
 - Habitat Analyzed
 - Conservation Measures
 - Potential Impacts and Effects Determination

Best,
Kristy

From:
Sent: Monday, February 17, 2025 12:07 PM
Subject: NPC Biological Assessment Meeting

Overview of the NPC Biological Assessment.

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Kristy Brightwell
Consulting Biologist
(she/her)

w: 307-996-8874

e: kbrightwell@west-inc.com

a: Remote Georgia, United States



From: [Kristy Brightwell](#)
To: [Amber Address \(External User\)](#); donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com; hanna_edens@fws.gov; jacob_martin@fws.gov; [Jeff Thommes](#); jeff_berglund@fws.gov; [John Kuba](#); [Kara Hempy-Mayer](#); [Lindsey Churchill](#); [Luke Toso](#); mike_mcgrath@fws.gov; [MVoth](#); [Ryan Davis](#)
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 - Potential to Occur
 - Habitat Analyzed
 - Conservation Measures
 - Potential Impacts and Effects Determination

Best,
Kristy

From:
Sent: Monday, February 17, 2025 12:07 PM
Subject: NPC Biological Assessment Meeting

Overview of the NPC Biological Assessment.

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North Plains Connector

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Montana and North Dakota Ecological Services Field Offices; Department of Energy (DOE); Grid United

Meeting Notes

March 20, 2025
3:00 PM CST
Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- Project Updates
 - Summarized local workspace refinements and location change of converter station in Colstrip.
 - Summarized anticipated Biological Assessment (BA) review and submission schedule, as well as the timelines of related documents such as the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements.
- Section 7 Consultation Process
 - DOE anticipates a 2-week review period in mid- to late August 2025 (Q2) for cooperating agencies (USFS, BLM, and USFWS) and a 30-day completeness review from USFWS prior to initiating formal consultation.
 - North Dakota (ND) Field Office (FO) will act as the Section 7 consultation lead and coordinate with Montana (MT) FO.
- BA Overview
 - Includes federally listed, proposed, and under review species.
 - Limits-of-disturbance (LOD) include workspaces and access roads, 200-foot right-of-way (ROW), and construction laydown yards.
 - Action Area is 1.7-mile (mi) distance from LOD for noise.
 - Summarized general conservation measures related to new project infrastructure, habitat loss/modification, fugitive dust, and contaminants.
- Species Analysis and Preliminary Determinations
 - **Dakota skipper (DASK; threatened) – Likely to Adversely Affect (LAA)**
 - Potential presence in Action Area
 - Known to occur in eastern ND; unlikely to occur in Action area in MT or western ND.
 - Project surveys included 2023-2024 habitat surveys and 2024 presence/likely absence (P/LA) surveys.
 - Second year of P/LA survey will occur in 2025.
 - Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed
 - Evaluated potentially suitable habitats included:



- Surveyed reproductive and proxy unbroken grasslands (>50% suitability).
 - Surveyed foraging and proxy broken grasslands (>50% suitability).
 - Incidental occurrence in Morton County will be buffered by 1 kilometer (km) and considered occupied habitat.
 - Reproductive habitat in Morton, Grant, and Oliver counties (ND) will be buffered by 1 km and considered potentially occupied.
 - Areas with no occurrence after second year or P/LA survey expected to shift to likely absent for BA.
 - Conservation measures
 - Within reproductive and foraging habitat in ND:
 - Minimize Project footprint and apply matting to minimize ground disturbance in reproductive habitat (Oliver, Morton, Grant counties).
 - Use non-chemical dust suppressants.
 - Within occupied habitat:
 - Avoid construction, burning, and herbicide application during flight period.
 - Apply herbicide using spot treatments only.
 - Impact discussion
 - Temporary disturbance in an unbroken native grassland is considered a permanent habitat loss for DASK.
 - No impacts anticipated outside workspace (i.e., in ROW or broader Action Area) based on conservation measures.
 - No adverse impacts (take) expected from habitat loss, disturbance, dust, contaminants, or electromagnetic field changes.
 - Adverse impact (take) due to physical injury of eggs/caterpillars expected in occupied reproductive habitat in Project workspace.
 - Agency feedback
 - USFWS ND agreed the analysis covers everything expected, and the conservation measures looked sufficient. The approach is consistent with how other projects have analyzed effects.
 - USFWS ND also suggested considering post-construction P/LA surveys to evaluate whether expected impacts occurred (at Project's discretion).
- **Western regal fritillary (proposed threatened) – LAA**
 - Potential presence in Action Area
 - Unlikely to occur in MT, known to occur in LOD in ND.
 - Incidental observations in Slope, Hettinger, Grant, Morton, and Oliver counties during 2023-2024 habitat surveys or 2024 DASK P/LA absence surveys.
 - Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed
 - Assessment included all herbaceous grasslands in ND.
 - Conservation measures
 - Benefits from DASK conservation measures in ND.
 - Add violets to seed mixes in herbaceous grassland, where possible.
 - Impact discussion
 - Similar impacts as DASK.



- Unlike DASK, impacts are anticipated in ROW outside Project workspace due to intermittent temporary impacts from vegetation trampling and potential non-spot herbicide use.
- No adverse impacts (take) expected from habitat loss, disturbance, dust, contaminants, or electromagnetic field changes.
- Adverse impact (take) due to physical injury of eggs/caterpillars expected in herbaceous grasslands in ND Project workspace.
- Agency feedback
 - USFWS ND asked for our rationale on not including MT in the impact analysis.
 - WEST noted that the USFWS Species Status Assessment considered MT unoccupied due to the lack of breeding populations in MT.
 - Also no known occurrences within Action Area in MT in per MT Natural Heritage Program (MT NHP) data or iNaturalist.
 - USFWS MT mentioned there may be recent reports not included in MT NHP data. He will follow up with information on recent reports to confirm absence in MT.
- **Monarch butterfly (proposed threatened) – LAA**
 - Potential presence in Action Area
 - Likely to occur in LOD in both MT and ND.
 - Incidental observations during 2023-2024 habitat surveys and 2024 DASK P/LA absence surveys.
 - Sightings were within herbaceous grasslands or shrublands.
 - Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed
 - Suitable habitats analyzed included herbaceous grasslands, shrublands, and forests.
 - In MT, further limited to optimal and moderate suitability classes in MT NHP Suitable Habitat Modeling.
 - Conservation measures
 - Benefits from DASK conservation measures in ND.
 - Add milkweed to seed mixes for post-construction restoration outside agricultural lands, where possible.
 - Impact discussion
 - Similar impacts as regal fritillary, though the acreage of impact is higher because it includes shrublands and forests, as well as both MT and ND.
 - Like regal fritillary, impacts are anticipated in ROW outside Project workspace due to potential non-spot herbicide use.
 - No adverse impacts (take) expected from habitat loss, disturbance, dust, contaminants, or electromagnetic field changes.
 - Adverse impact (take) due to physical injury of eggs/caterpillars expected in herbaceous grasslands and shrublands in workspaces in MT and ND.
 - Agency feedback
 - WEST requested feedback on the inclusion of forest in the suitable habitat.
 - USFWS MT agreed with the approach, and said that knowledge of monarch behavior and habitat use in MT is limited. He recommended including forest unless we have a good reason to exclude it.



- Implement Project plans to minimize potential impacts from erosion or spills during construction.
 - Agency feedback
 - USFWS agreed with the approach and preliminary determination.
 - **Pinyon jay (under review) – NLAA**
 - Potential presence in Action Area
 - Unlikely to occur in ND Action Area.
 - Likely to occur in MT, but no evidence of breeding in MT Project counties.
 - Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed
 - 5-mi buffers on recent occurrences (post-2000) from MT NHP and eBird that overlapped with the LOD were considered occupied habitat.
 - Suitable habitats in the Action Area include ponderosa pine and pine-juniper woodlands based on the MT land cover framework.
 - Suitable habitat limited to moderate suitability habitat in MT NHP Predicted Suitable Habitat Modeling.
 - No optimal suitability in Action Area.
 - Conservation measures
 - Above vegetation clearing or conduct nest clearance searches prior to construction during the general migratory bird nesting season (April 15 to July 15).
 - Implement Project-wide general conservation measures and migratory bird compliance plan.
 - Impact discussion
 - Minimal habitat permanently converted to grassland in the ROW.
 - Impacts from noise and human activity would be temporary and intermittent.
 - No adverse impacts from habitat loss, physical injury, disturbance, predation, or contaminants because no known nesting colonies in the Action Area.
 - Agency feedback
 - USFWS MT agreed that NLAA was justified, based on the minimal habitat removal and insignificant direct effects.
 - **Whooping crane (endangered) – NLAA**
 - Potential presence in Action Area
 - Potential to occur in MT Action Area, but unlikely (outside the migratory corridor);
 - Impacts limited to ND, only three on-the-ground occurrences in Action Area.
 - Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed
 - Niemuth model
 - Relative probability of whooping crane habitat use.
 - Assessment areas included the Action Area, a 2-km Infrastructure Avoidance Area (completely within the Action Area), and adjacent habitat out to 20-km from the LOD (excluding Action Area).
 - Highest probability of use within the Action Area was approximately 10%.
 - Adjacent habitat had a higher probability of use (up to approx. 53%).
 - Probability of use increases west to east, as expected.
 - Collision risk model



- Used USFWS Reasonably Certain Knowledge model, with some modifications, including updated migration mortality numbers.
 - Most of route in North Dakota (239 mi) is within 95% confidence interval of the 95% band of the migration corridor.
 - 50-year cumulative mortality estimates:
 - 0.453 crane without bird flight diverters (BFDs)
 - 0.227 crane with BFDs (50% reduction)
 - Model run did not include recent mortalities, which will further reduce mortality estimate in future calculations.
- Direct habitat loss
 - Suitable habitats analyzed included freshwater emergent, riparian emergent, and riverine wetlands and lakes/ponds.
- Conservation measures
 - Stop work if a crane is sited and avoid disturbance within 1 mi until cranes leave area.
 - Mark or lower equipment over 15 feet tall when not in use, at night, or during low visibility.
 - Install BFDs within 75% migration corridor in ND.
- Impact discussion
 - Minimal temporary or permanent impacts from workspace.
 - No adverse effects from physical injury because collision risk is insignificant/discountable.
 - No adverse effects from disturbance because risk is insignificant/discountable based on the low probability of use in the Action Area. (Cranes are more likely to be attracted to Missouri River outside of the Action Area.)
 - No adverse effects from predation or contaminants.
- Agency feedback
 - USFWS ND agreed that there are more whooping crane observations east of the Missouri River, and approach discussed makes sense.
 - He mentioned legal discussions that have been occurring regarding habitat degradation within 2-mi of other proposed projects, but said that may not change the determination for NPC.
 - He also mentioned that a few transmission lines across the migration corridor have ended up at LAA determinations, even with bird flight diverters, due to the remaining chance of mortality.
 - USFWS may have some refinements as they look at the draft BA.
 - WEST asked if the 2-km buffer was related to the infrastructure avoidance distance included in our assessment of the Niemuth Model.
 - USFWS ND said yes, but asked if airspace was considered as habitat, given the energetic cost to avoid transmission infrastructure.
 - WEST noted that since the cranes are unlikely to stop in the Action Area, there would be a low likelihood of energetic impacts.
 - USFWS ND asked if avoidance from existing infrastructure was evaluated.
 - He added that existing infrastructure would subtract from the Project's effect, since some avoidance may already be happening, but could also mean increased Project impacts if no existing infrastructure was present.



- WEST said that Niemuth model does not account for existing lines, wind turbines, or roads.
 - WEST will examine existing infrastructure and potential crane avoidance in more detail in the next iteration of the stand-alone whooping crane impact report.
 - Shorebirds
 - **Piping plovers (threatened) – NLAA**
 - Potential presence in Action Area
 - Potential as migrants in Action Area, but unlikely as no documented occurrences in Action Area in either state.
 - Piping plovers tend to migrate non-stop and use stopover habitat opportunistically.
 - More likely continue on to critical breeding habitat at the Missouri River, which is outside of the Action Area.
 - Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed
 - Suitable stopover habitats in the Action Area include riverine wetlands and lakes/pond.
 - Reproductive habitat occurs outside the Action Area along the Missouri River.
 - **Rufa Red knot - NLAA**
 - Potential presence in Action Area
 - Potential rare migrants in Action Area, but more likely to use Yellowstone River in MT; there are no consistent stopover sites in ND.
 - No occurrences in MT Action Area, one 2015 eBird occurrence in ND.
 - Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed
 - Suitable habitats include freshwater emergent, riparian emergent, and riverine wetlands and lakes/ponds.
 - Shorebird conservation measures
 - Implement Project-wide migratory bird compliance plan.
 - If sighted, stop construction within 0.6 mi until birds leave area (April 15 to August 31).
 - Shorebird impact discussion
 - Minimal loss of temporary or permanent piping plover or red knot stopover habitat in Project workspace. Red knot impacts slightly higher because of the emergent wetland habitat.
 - No adverse effects from physical injury, disturbance, or contaminants as both species are unlikely to stopover in the Action Area.
 - Agency feedback
 - USFWS agreed with the approach and determination and added if the Action Area is not affecting breeding habitat, then occasional minor impacts to birds moving through are not a concern.
 - **Bats**
 - Overview of potential presence in Action Area
 - Project surveys included 2023-2024 presence/probable absence (P/A) surveys, 2023 supplemental mist-netting, and 2023-2024 hibernacula desktop assessment/field surveys.



- Summer habitat:
 - **Northern long-eared bat (NLEB; endangered)** - 5 detections in Slope and Morton counties.
 - **Little brown bats (LBBA; under review)** - detected Project-wide and captured during mist-net surveys.
 - **Tricolored bat (TRBA; proposed endangered)** - not detected; assumed absent.
- Winter habitat:
 - 3 suitable hibernacula were identified (2 MT and 1 ND). Occupancy is unknown, P/A surveys are planned for 2025.
 - No known occupied hibernacula for these species in Action Area
- Impact area / suitable habitats analyzed:
 - Occupied habitat:
 - 1.5 mi from NLEB detections.
 - 3 mi from LBBA detections.
 - If hibernacula are determined to be occupied, there will be a 5-mi buffer for staging/swarming habitat.
 - Suitable roosting habitat in the Action Area includes forests.
- Conservation measures
 - Within summer habitat, avoid tree felling, construction, or bridge/culvert repair during pup season (June 1 – August 15) within 1.5 mi of NLEB detections.
 - Project may instead opt to conduct P/A and telemetry surveys to identify roosts for avoidance.
 - Conduct P/A hibernacula surveys, and if NLEB are present:
 - Avoid tree felling within 5 mi of hibernacula during active season (April 15 – October 31).
 - Avoid blasting or burning within 0.25 mi during hibernation (November 1 – April 14).
 - Develop site-specific blasting plans if proposed within 0.5 mi of occupied hibernacula.
 - No tree felling within 0.25 mi of occupied hibernacula year-round without take statement.
 - No LBBA-specific conservation measures currently identified.
- Impact discussion
 - TRBA – NE due to absence
 - NLEB – LAA
 - Minor permanent tree removal within ROW; impacts exceed 0.5 ac impacted in areas with <10% forest cover (considered an adverse effect based on interim guidance).
 - No adverse effects from physical injury, disturbance, or contaminants due to time-of-year restriction buffers and conservation measures.
 - LBBA – LAA
 - Permanent conversion of forest within ROW and permanent workspaces, plus temporary forest removal in temporary workspaces outside the ROW.



- Adverse effects are possible from physical injury and disturbance outside NLEB time-of-year restriction buffers.
 - No adverse effects from contaminants.
 - Agency feedback
 - USFWS wanted to confirm if the NLEB staging/swarming buffer was 3 or 5 mi (note; confirmed 5 mi after meeting).
 - USFWS MT noted there is no LBBA-specific guidance as they are scheduled for review in FY 2026, but recommended following the same guidance as NLEB.
 - USFWS asked about the source for using 1.5-mi buffer for NLEB as there are different numbers suggested between the survey guidelines and standing analysis. WEST responded that the buffer was from the voluntary consultation guidance but will confirm.
 - USFWS recommended continuing to use 3-mi buffer for LBBA.
 - USFWS asked if WEST reviewed buildings and bridges in the Action Area. USFWS suggested conducting surveys before any bridge construction to look for presence, but that no impacts would be anticipated for bridges being driven over with no additional construction.
 - WEST will review the potential for old buildings and bridges within the Action Area.
- Additional discussion:
 - USFWS asked about the Project construction completion date.
 - Project construction anticipated to start with tree felling in fall 2027 and take up to 4 years in total, with 1-2 years in any given area along the Project.
 - USFWS asked if the Project was considering a disturbance permit for eagles?
 - WEST confirmed that the Project is still planning to seek a nest disturbance permit.
 - WEST will be reaching out this summer to check in and continue discussion on the eagle permitting.
 - USFWS noted that bridge/culvert surveys are good for 2 years, while P/A results are good for 5 years. USFWS suggested reaching out to state DOTs for results from their bridge/culvert surveys.
 - USFWS noted that the year of survey is considered the first year of the 5-year period over which surveys are considered valid. For example, surveys conducted in 2023 would expire in fall the of 2027; for those started in 2024, the data would expire in 2028.
 - USFWS commented there could be potential for an extension based on the species and population status. May consider updates to the 5-year clock on a site-by-site basis.
 - USFWS confirmed that tree clearing conducted outside the active season would be allowed after the 5-year window.
 - USFWS mentioned that the consultation range map will receive updates annually.
 - WEST asked for clarification on when USFWS considers the risk of mortality for whooping cranes discountable or when habitat degradation would qualify as significant.
 - USFWS asked to follow up on a separate call due to a legal review of another project concerning this question.



- Other projects that had an LAA determination spanned the entire whooping crane migration corridor, so there may be flexibility for NPC since it only crosses a portion of the corridor.

Action Area

- WEST will provide the PowerPoint as a PDF to Jake Martin (USFWS).
- USFWS MT will follow up with pollinator specialists at USFWS.
- USFWS ND will follow up with whooping crane information, per the pending legal review.
- WEST will incorporate existing infrastructure into the whooping crane impact assessment document.
- WEST will schedule a call with USFWS for this summer to review the updated whooping crane analysis and follow up on other pending questions prior to BA finalization.

Attendee List

USFWS – Montana: Jake Martin, Mike McGrath

USFWS – North Dakota: Luke Toso, Hanna Edens, Chris Swanson

Regional USFWS: Amber Andress

DOE: Kirsten Christopherson

Grid United: John Kuba, Ryan Davis

WEST: Maggie Voth, Kristy Brightwell, Kara Hempy-Mayer

Merjent: Lindsey Churchill



North Plains Connector

North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD)

Meeting Notes

April 3, 2025
11:00 AM CST
Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- Purpose of Meeting
 - Confirm with the NDGFD that NPC's responses to their comment letter meet recommendations.
- Native Prairie / Unbroken Grasslands
 - Letter recommendations:
 - Avoid Project impacts to native prairie to the extent possible and limit fragmentation of contiguous native prairie.
 - Reclaim disturbed areas to pre-Project conditions.
 - Project response:
 - Project workspaces have been adjusted to minimize impacts to unbroken grasslands.
 - Remaining permanent impacts (permanent workspace) are very small.
 - Temporary workspace impacts are larger, but overestimate actual ground disturbance, and include non-ground disturbing workspaces (e.g., pulling sites, overland travel roads, and areas with timber matting).
 - Roughly 63% of the Project's temporary workspace will require limited or no ground disturbance.
 - Project has been sited to avoid bisecting large areas of unbroken grasslands where possible based on other competing constraints, such as cultural survey results and landowner requests.
 - Project will follow Construction, Mitigation, and Reclamation Plan (CMRP) to minimize impacts during construction and restore areas post-construction.
 - Specific measures include retaining seedbanks and rootstock during vegetation removal, noxious weed management, use of weed-free seed mixes with pollinator-friendly forbs, and contour restoration.
 - Further discussion:
 - Grassland impacts:
 - NDGFD considers ground-breaking disturbances within an unbroken grassland to be a permanent impact, even if reseeded or replanted.
 - Activities that do not break the ground, such as timber matting, would be a temporary disturbance.
 - NDGFD would like to see updated temporary and permanent impacts that differentiate ground-breaking vs. non-ground-breaking workspaces.



- Maggie V. (WEST) responded that it would be difficult to provide exact estimates of ground disturbance due to the level of site-specific characteristics, and estimated approximately 31% to 63% would be considered temporary impacts (i.e., non-ground-breaking).
 - North Plains agreed to take a closer look this to provide an estimate using NDGFD's definitions.
 - Seed Mixes
 - Elisha M. (NDGFD) asked if the grassland seed mixes contained entirely native species.
 - Maggie V. and Lindsey C. (Merjent) confirmed that the seed mixes would be free of weed species and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service-approved, but would need to look into the specific species.
 - CMRP does include detail on specific seed mixes for state and federal lands, based on land managing agency requirements, but not private lands.
 - North Plains will add condition in CMRP that native seed mixes are to be used in native prairie on private lands.
 - Elisha M. confirmed that these measures should meet NDGFD recommendations. However, she would like further information on potential impacts and grassland seed mixes for privately owned land.
- Wetlands
 - Letter recommendations:
 - Avoid or minimize wetland impacts during Project construction.
 - Mitigate unavoidable impacts.
 - Project response:
 - Project workspaces have been adjusted to minimize impacts to wetlands.
 - Remaining wetland impacts include approximately 0.1 acres in permanent workspaces and 6.5 acres in temporary workspaces.
 - Timber matting will be used in the temporary workspace to further reduce impacts.
 - North Plains will comply with Nationwide Permit 57, including mitigation requirements.
 - Further discussion:
 - NDGFD had no further comments on the proposed measures.
- Avian Impacts
 - Letter recommendations:
 - Minimize avian impacts by marking powerlines over perennial streams or near large wetland complexes.
 - Project response:
 - The Project is currently proposing line marking within the 75% whooping crane corridor, which includes crossings of several perennial waterbodies.
 - WEST is currently working on an avian collision risk assessment to identify additional transmission line segments that may benefit from line marking.
 - Project will also implement a Migratory Bird Treaty Act Compliance Plan and an Avian Protection Plan, to address avian concerns during construction and operations, respectively.
 - Further discussion:



- NDGFD would like to review the assessment prior to the Public Service Commission (PSC) application filing.
 - The assessment report should be available for agency submission shortly before the PSC filing, and WEST will coordinate an additional meeting to discuss the assessment results further in advance (tentatively late May).
- Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)
 - Letter recommendations:
 - A special use permit could be needed if construction impacts a WMA.
 - Project response:
 - There are 2 WMAs within 0.5 mile of the Project: Otter Creek WMA in Grant County and Wilbur Boldt WMA in Oliver County.
 - Project centerline is approximately 0.3 mile from both WMAs.
 - Exceeds previously recommended 0.25-mile buffer.
 - No special use permits are proposed.
 - Further discussion:
 - NDGFD had no comments or concerns.
- Prairie Grouse
 - Letter recommendations:
 - Avoid siting in nesting habitat within a 1-mile buffer of a lek and restrict construction during the lekking and nesting seasons (March 15-July 15).
 - Project response:
 - No active greater sage-grouse leks within 2 miles of the Project in North Dakota.
 - 18 sharp-tailed grouse leks within 1 mile of Project structures.
 - Project was unable to avoid all the sharp-tailed grouse lek 1-mile buffers, due to the number and distribution; however, no leks are within Project workspace or right-of-way.
 - Instead, North Plains will implement time-of-year restrictions (TOYR) from March 15 to July 15 in grasslands within 1 mile of each lek, with the following exceptions:
 - TOYRs would apply only in grasslands; work would continue in non-grassland habitats (e.g. croplands).
 - If construction within a lek buffer was initiated before March 15, ongoing work within that buffer would continue.
 - If greater schedule flexibility is necessary within a particular lek buffer, North Plains would instead avoid construction activities from half an hour before sunrise to 10 AM, prohibit blasting, and monitor for sharp-tailed grouse within the 1-mile lek buffer.
 - Further discussion:
 - Elisha M. would like to follow up with Jesse Kolar (NDGFD) on the lek conservation strategy.
 - Elisha M. mentioned that the intention of the recommendation is to protect nesting areas in grassland; she recommended North Plains consider where the surrounding grassland is in relation to the lek when considering impacts and TOYR.
- Raptor Nests
 - Letter recommendations:
 - Conduct surveys for raptor nests before construction.
 - Add construction buffers around active eagle nests per the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) eagle management guidelines.



- Project response:
 - Project conducted raptor nest surveys in 2022 and 2023. Pre-construction eagle nest surveys will also be conducted to identify new nests.
 - North Plains is coordinating with the USFWS and plans to obtain an eagle nest disturbance permit before the start of construction.
 - North Plains is developing an Eagle Management Plan to support permitting and will follow federal regulations pertaining to bald and golden eagles.
- Further discussion:
 - Elisha M. replied that she did not have any comments, but she would double-check with an eagle specialist at the NDGFD.
 - NDGFD confirmed there are no applicable state permits for eagle disturbance.
- Other comments:
 - The NDGFD would like all follow-up information, including plans or reports, around the time that we submit our application to the PSC.
 - NDGFD will submit a letter of recommendation 30 days prior to the PSC hearing.

Action Items

- WEST will provide updated estimates of unbroken grassland impacts based on the NDGFD definitions of temporary and permanent impacts.
- North Plains will provide information on the seed mix that will be used on native grasslands on privately owned land.
- NDGFD will confirm the grouse conservation measures with Jesse Kolar.
- NDGFD will confirm raptor nest responses with their eagle specialist.
- WEST will schedule a follow-up meeting with NDGFD to discuss the results of the collision risk assessment and comments from species specialists.

Attendee List

NDGFD: Elisha Mueller, John Schumacher
WEST: Maggie Voth, Kara Hempy-Mayer
Merjent: Lindsey Churchill
Grid United: DJ Worth, Ryan Davis

From: Maggie Voth <mvoth@west-inc.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 3, 2026 6:19 PM
To: Jesse L. Kolar; Mueller, Elisha K.
Cc: Lindsey Churchill; Chad LeBeau; John Kuba; Jennifer Stelzleni
Subject: EXTERNAL: NPC - NDGFD letter follow-up meeting (1/12/26) - meeting minutes
Attachments: 260112 NDGFD Comment Letter Follow-up Meeting.docx

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Merjent.

Hi Jesse and Elisha,

Thank you again for the good discussion on January 12th - the meeting minutes are attached for your review and approval.

We did want to direct your attention to the footnotes on page 5. During the meeting, we discussed sharp-tailed grouse lekking/nesting activities and Project restrictions in detail, sometimes calling out lekking or nesting separately, and other times referring to them as a combined time period (i.e., March 15-July 15). The footnotes flag additional date ranges not specifically shown in the meeting PowerPoint but that have been added to the minutes to separate the specific lekking and nesting date ranges and provide better clarity regarding which Project restrictions are appropriate to each window.

Please let us know if you have any comments or feedback.

Thank you,
Maggie



Maggie Voth
Senior Biologist, Project Manager

Western EcoSystems Technology, Inc.
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North Plains Connector Project

North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD)

Meeting Notes

January 12, 2026
3 PM CT
In-person and Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- Project Updates
 - Grid United (GU) summarized the Project's history and recent milestones, including status of landowner agreements, the completion of the fourth year of field surveys, and potential for limited follow-up surveys in 2026.
 - Federal permitting updates:
 - The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is the lead federal agency coordinating the Project's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review.
 - DOE published a Notice of Intent for the Project's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in October 2024.
 - The DEIS was published on 1/9/2026 and is now in a 45-day comment period.
 - The NEPA Record of Decision is anticipated in late 2026.
 - State permitting updates:
 - Major Facility Siting Act (MFSA) application completed in 2025 and Montana Department of Environmental Quality is coordinating with DOE for a joint state/federal Montana Environmental Policy Act/NEPA analysis.
 - The Project anticipates submitting an application for a Certificate of Corridor Compatibility and Route Permit to the Public Service Commission (PSC) in late January 2026.
 - Local updates:
 - 4 of 6 County Conditional Use Permits (CUP) were secured in 2025; the CUP application for Oliver County was submitted and the SUP application for Morton County will be submitted in the next month or two.
 - Project construction (i.e., tree felling) may begin as early as late 2027.
- Recap of previous NDGFD Coordination
 - NDGFD issued a recommendation letter for the Project in January 2025.



- In response, the Project met with NDGFD in April 2025 to discuss the recommendations and seek concurrence on the Project's plans to address each concern.
- Today's discussion addressed outstanding information requests from the April meeting and provide updates to the Project's approach regarding native prairie/unbroken grasslands, sharp-tailed grouse, and migratory birds.
- Avoidance and minimization measures from this discussion will be included in the Project's application to the PSC.

- Native Prairie/Unbroken Grasslands
 - NDGFD Recommendation:
 - Avoid impacts and fragmentation where possible and reclaim disturbed areas to preconstruction conditions.
 - Project Response:
 - Project has been sited to avoid fragmenting contiguous grasslands, where possible based on competing constraints, such as cultural survey findings, steep slopes, and landowner requests.
 - Project prioritized keeping workspaces parallel to existing disturbed areas, such as roads and crop fields.
 - Workspaces have been adjusted and micro-sited to minimize impacts to unbroken grasslands where possible, including further refinements and acreage reductions since April.
 - Remaining workspaces include:
 - Approx. 13 acres of permanent workspaces
 - Approx. 793 acres of temporary workspaces, which will be restored after construction, if disturbed.
 - Stated according to impacts, per NDGFD's request:
 - Temporary impacts include areas with no ground disturbance (approx. 209 acres), including overland travel and temporary workspaces with timber matting).
 - Permanent impacts include:
 - Approx. 13 acres of permanent workspace, where permanent infrastructure such as structure footprints and existing road improvements will remain.
 - Up to 584 acres of temporary workspace with the potential for ground disturbance, such as temporary access roads and temporary workspaces (i.e., structure pad construction and pulling sites).
 - This overestimates impacts - actual ground disturbance within temporary workspaces will be more limited; however, grading



specifics will not be determined until later design phases.

- Grading needs within areas such as pulling sites are expected to be limited.
- Additional minimization measures:
 - Implement the Project's Construction, Mitigation, and Reclamation Plan (CMRP), including the following:
 - Construction measures: leave root stock and seed bank, segregate topsoil, implement invasive/noxious weed control plans, and all counties have reviewed and approved the weed plan.
 - Restoration measures: grading and contour restoration; certified weed free seed mixes (federal agencies to dictate seed mixes for federal lands, seed mixes for private lands to be identified in coordination with Natural Resource Conservation Service [NRCS]); and minimize herbicide use with no aerial application.
- Discussion:
 - NDGFD asked whether the Project has identified mitigation requirements.
 - John Kuba (GU) replied that the Project has sought to avoid and minimize impacts to habitats in North Dakota through routing and design, but noted that Endangered Species Act consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is ongoing and mitigation could potentially be required in overlapping areas.
 - NDGFD confirmed that it cannot require mitigation, but mitigation is recommended for permanent habitat loss.
 - NDGFD acknowledged that the PSC holds the authority to issue requirements, NDGFD will include this recommendation in their application review letter to the PSC.
 - NDGFD recommended creating habitat to offset the 13 acres of permanent impacts (permanent loss) that the Project cannot restore.
 - NDGFD confirmed that the Project's proposed restoration of the remaining temporary workspace areas (where ground disturbance occurs) will address the agency's concerns for these areas.
 - NDGFD asked about tree and shrub removal, and the Project's plan to address the PSC's 2:1 replacement ratio requirement.
 - Lindsey Churchill (Merjent) noted that the ND PSC allows flexibility and that the project will typically work with the landowners first to respond to their preferences.
 - NDGFD noted that some shrub species (chokecherry, buffaloberry, and buck brush) provide important winter habitat to



- the sharp-tailed grouse and should be retained and/or replanted, if possible.
- NDGFD asked what plans the Project has to protect permanent roads against public use.
 - NDGFD and the Project acknowledge that public use of the Project's access roads would not be allowed.
 - The Project is not aware of any requirements or recommendations leveled by agencies with jurisdiction in North Dakota, but notes that Bureau of Land Management is requesting implementation of measures to discourage public use of access roads on its lands in Montana.
 - Sharp-tailed Grouse (STGR)
 - NDGFD Recommendation:
 - Avoid siting structures in nesting habitat within a 1-mile buffer of prairie grouse leks (including STGR) and apply seasonal construction restrictions.
 - Project Response:
 - Per April discussion, no active greater sage-grouse leks within 2 miles of the Project in North Dakota.
 - Current focused is on STGR based on documented occurrences along the Project.
 - 33 leks identified within 2 miles of the Project during aerial surveys in 2022.
 - Of those, 18 leks occur within 1 mile of Project structures.
 - Based on the April discussion, the Project reviewed these 18 leks in greater detail to evaluate the potential nesting habitat within each buffer and its location relative to proposed Project structures.
 - 13 leks had structures sited within potential nesting habitat.
 - 5 leks where structure placement was able to avoid or minimize impacts to potential nesting habitat by siting structures in cropland, already fragmented or isolated grasslands, or co-locating with existing roads.
 - These leks were shown in detail for NDGFD review and concurrence.
 - NDGFD acknowledged that while the grouse can occur at roadsides, the Project has done the right thing in co-locating with existing roads where possible.
 - Minimization Measures and Discussion:
 - Project will implement time-of-year-restrictions (TOYR) for grouse protection:
 - At the 13 lek buffers where sharp-tailed grouse nesting habitat is within 1 mile of Project structures, North Plains will restrict



- construction activity in grasslands within 1 mile of each lek location between March 15 – July 15.
- Construction restrictions would be limited to grasslands; work would continue in other land cover types (e.g., croplands).
 - North Plains may continue work within a given lek buffer during this period if activities began prior to March 15; however, no new construction will be initiated within buffers that remain undisturbed at the start of the lekking and nesting season.
- If adherence to the March 15 – July 15 activity restriction is not possible within a specific 1 mile lek buffer, North Plains will: (1) avoid construction activity within 0.25 mile of the lek from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:00 am between March 15 and May 1 to minimize disturbance to lekking individuals,¹ (2) prohibit blasting within 1 mile of the lek between March 15 and July 15, and (3) monitor for sharp-tailed grouse presence during Project activities within the 1 mile lek buffer.
 - Potential activities that may warrant this exception include minimally disturbing activities such as site inspections, equipment retrieval, installing or fixing erosion control measures, etc.
 - Noisier construction activities would not occur.
 - If further flexibility is required, North Plains will: (1) avoid construction activity within 0.25 mile of a lek from 30 minutes before sunrise to 10:00 am between March 15 and May 1 to minimize disturbance to lekking individuals and (2) conduct nest clearance surveys on grasslands within 1 mile of a lek location between May 1 and July 15 to minimize impacts to nesting individuals.²
 - Allows for the full complement of construction activities to occur, while avoiding activity in the morning during the lekking period, and avoiding grasslands with active (field-confirmed) nesting during the nesting period.
 - Project believes there will be a low likelihood for construction activities to occur in a lek buffer but would like the flexibility if a need arises.
 - Regarding the nest clearance survey - Western EcoSystem Services, Inc. (WEST) suggested dragging ropes.
 - NDGFD recommended limiting nest clearing surveys to the area of proposed construction plus a 100-foot buffer.
- Migratory Birds
 - NDGFD Recommendation:

^{1,2} Note, discussions during the meeting focused on the lekking and nesting activities, but the date ranges originally shown in the meeting powerpoint used a broader time period that encompassed the larger breeding period. The timing has been corrected here, based on current research in South Dakota.



- NDGFD recommended line marking over perennial streams and large wetland complexes to minimize avian impacts.
- Project Response:
 - WEST briefly summarized the Project's line marking analysis.
 - Line marking is proposed on 129 miles (more than 50% of the project in North Dakota), including:
 - 9 miles near White Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Slope County)
 - 119 miles within the whooping crane 75% corridor (Grant, Morton, and Oliver counties)
 - Line marking will encompass marking at several perennial waterbodies.
 - The Project does not cross any large wetland complexes.
 - Project will also implement its Migratory Bird Treaty Act Compliance Plan (MBTA Compliance Plan) to address avian concerns during construction.
 - The Plan was provided to NDGFD in November 2025.
 - A summary and map of the line marking areas is also included in the MBTA Compliance Plan.
 - Project will develop an Avian Protection Plan (APP) to outline protective measures during the operations phase.
- Discussion:
 - The group discussed perching and perch deterrents.
 - Project will primarily install monopoles which provide less opportunity for perching.
 - NDGFD voiced its support for use of monopole structures (as opposed to lattice structures).
 - The Project's PSC application will include diagrams of proposed structure types, as lattice structures may be needed in certain areas due to difficult access or engineering constraints.
 - Parties agree that the efficacy of perch deterrents is low, particularly given the availability of the OPGW for perching.
 - The Project plans to implement an intensive monitoring program during construction. Commitments have been made to agencies during the NEPA review and Project is starting to build the program now.
- Other topics:
 - NDGFD asked about the potential for related development (other transmission lines, energy generation).
 - The Project team confirmed that the Project is not designed to connect to any particular generation source.
 - High-voltage direct current (HVDC) technology dictates that interconnection must occur at a converter station. Converter stations will be constructed only at the western and eastern ends of the HVDC transmission line, which limits the possible interconnection locations for energy generation.



- While additional development is possible, no plans are known at this time or would be related specific to this line. Other new development would have to obtain permits as well.
- Public Lands Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS)
 - NDGFD asks if there are any clauses restricting access to sportsmen on hunting lands with public access that are traversed by the Project.
 - Lindsey Churchill confirmed that the Project recently met with Kevin and Andrew (Private Lands Department – NDGFD) to begin coordination on timing of construction, permanent loss of acreage, and minimizing Project impacts to hunting.
 - The Project team confirmed that restricted access to hunters will only be of concern during Project construction.

Action Items

- Items discussed today will be reflected in the PSC application, which is anticipated in late January or early February.
- Project team will let NDGFD know when the PSC application is posted to the PSC docket.
- NDGFD to share a draft of its recommendation letter in advance of submittal to PSC.

Attendee List:

NDGFD: Elisha Mueller, Jesse Kolar
Grid United: John Kuba, Jennifer Stelzleni
WEST: Maggie Voth, Chad LeBeau
Merjent: Lindsey Churchill

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Bureau of Land Management (North Dakota)



North Plains Connector

USFS, BLM, Grid United Meeting Notes

October 12, 2021
2:00 PM MT
USFS/BLM Office
Dickinson, ND

General

- Southern routes preferred; north routes look problematic
- A lot of sage grouse habitat may be unoccupied in the historical range – coordinate with NDGFD
- Badlands Conservation Alliance would have interest in the project if built in the badlands
- Crossing the Little Missouri River on federally owned lands may be more challenging because of viewshed impacts
- Paleontology surveys required south of interstate 94
- ARPA permit required for archaeology and paleontology surveys
- Not aware of tribal allotment lands within North Plains Connector corridor
- ROW application will start the process

USFS

- Recommend routing in higher numbered Management Areas (generally)
- Exclude: Suitable for Wilderness (1.2A), Nonmotorized Backcountry Recreation (1.31), Research Natural Areas (2.2), Inventoried Roadless Areas (will have construction limits for roads)
- 4.22 – River and Travel Corridors will have scenic integrity issues
- If on USFS land, recommend routing in 6.1 and 3.65
- Plan considers big horn sheep
- Avoid Ponderosa Pines (only locations within ND)
- Commonly consult with Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation
- May do visual simulations at specific points on the line
 - Visual assessment done in Missoula office; may hire 3rd party.
- ROW application
 - Can have proposed routes – doesn't need a preferred route
 - Cost recovery – processed/paid before start of work
 - Authorizations, not ROW (30 year, can be renewed)
 - 3rd party contractors can speed up work and reduce cost recovery (archaeology, paleontology, wildlife/botany, visual assessment, EIS)

BLM

- New draft Resource Management Plan coming out this winter
- ROD on new plan possibly in fall 2022
- Plan will likely have sage grouse ROW avoidance in Bowman County
- ROW application
 - Requires a bond



- ROW (30 year, renewable)
- May want a 3rd party to write EIS, especially if multi-agency

Action Items

- Resource Management Plans available online
- Grid United to follow up with GIS shapefile request
- Jason Dekker – primary USFS contact for project
- Greg Morel – primary BLM contact for project
- Grid United to follow up as routes are finalized

Attachments

Attendee List

Attendee List

North Plains Connectors

USFS, BLM, Grid United

10-12-21

Misty Hays	USFS	misty.hays@usda.gov
Lindsay Churchill	MERJENT	lindsay.churchill@merjent.com
Luke Martinson	WEST mc	lmartinson@west-mc.com
Chelsie Splichal	BLM	csplichal@blm.gov
Greg Morel	BLM	gmorel@blm.gov
Jadyn Nelson	USFS	jadyn.nelson@usda.gov
Jason Dekker	USFS	jason.dekker@usda.gov
Allie Wahrenberger	Grid United	allie.wahrenberger@gridunited.com
Denisha Cummings	Grid United	denisha.cummings@gridunited.com
Brant Johnson	"	brant.johnson@gridunited.com

From: [Donnie Joe Worth](#)
To: [McKenzie, Chelsie J](#)
Cc: [Lindsey Churchill](#); [Denisha Cummings](#)
Subject: EXTERNAL: RE: [EXTERNAL] RE: Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project
Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 5:52:10 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Merjent.

Chelsie,

Response received. Thank you!

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: McKenzie, Chelsie J <cmckenzie@blm.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 5:41 PM
To: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>; Denisha Cummings <Denisha.Cummings@gridunited.com>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] RE: Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project

CAUTION: This message was sent from outside the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

DJ,

Yes I did receive the shapefile and I have reviewed it, looks like the line avoids BLM lands on the North Dakota side so we have no concerns here at NDFO.

Thank you

Chelsie McKenzie
Realty Specialist
Bureau of Land Management
North Dakota Field Office

**99 23rd Avenue West, Suite A
Dickinson, ND 58601
Office: 701-227-7702
Cell: 701-502-1271**

From: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 3:40 PM
To: McKenzie, Chelsie J <cmckenzie@blm.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>; Denisha Cummings <Denisha.Cummings@gridunited.com>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

Chelsie,

I wanted to follow up to check if you received the Shapefile package and see if you have any questions. We are actively working with the Mile City BLM office on the environmental review and draft Plan of Development where the Project crosses BLM land in Montana.

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Donnie Joe Worth
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2025 11:38 AM
To: McKenzie, Chelsie J <cmckenzie@blm.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project

Chelsie,

Attached are the requested shapefiles for North Plains Connector.

Thank you!

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donnioe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Donnie Joe Worth
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2025 1:51 PM
To: McKenzie, Chelsie J <cmckenzie@blm.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project

Chelsie,

Confirming receipt of your email. In approximately a month, we can provide a shapefile of the North Plains Connector Project.

Thank you,

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donnioe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: McKenzie, Chelsie J <cmckenzie@blm.gov>
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 9:59 AM
To: Donnie Joe Worth <donnioe.worth@gridunited.com>
Subject: Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project

You don't often get email from cmckenzie@blm.gov. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: This message was sent from outside the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you

recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Donnie Joe,

I received the notice for the North Plains Connector Project. After reviewing the map the BLM does have parcels within 4 of the counties the project is going through, would you be able to provide me a shapefile or legal land descriptions so I can review those counties closer.

Thank you

Chelsie McKenzie
Realty Specialist
Bureau of Land Management
North Dakota Field Office
99 23rd Avenue West, Suite A
Dickinson, ND 58601
Office: 701-227-7702
Cell: 701-502-1271

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North Dakota Department of Trust Lands

North Plains Connector

North Dakota Department of Trust Lands (NDDTL) Meeting Notes

May 3, 2022
11:00 PM CST
NDDTL Office
Bismarck, ND

Attendee List

Grid United: Brant Johnson

Merjent: Lindsey Churchill

NDDTL: Kayla Spangelo

General

- Grid United (GU) provided overview of the project
 - GU shared overview maps of NDDTL parcels the project crosses
 - NDDTL did not have initial concerns
- Discussed NDDTL ROW Application and Survey Permit process
 - NDDTL will do desktop review for parcels in ROW Application
 - GU to include preliminary information in ROW Application
 - If location of project changes after ROW Application submitted, email Kayla with added/deleted NDDTL parcels
 - NDDTL executes ROW lease after Public Service Commission (PSC) approval
 - KLJ and WEST already have survey permits
 - QSI needs to apply for survey permit
- GU explained additional permits needed for project
- NDDTL has separate process for land purchases
- GU shared general types of surveys to occur (cultural resources, wildlife, wetlands/waters, civil survey)

Action Items

- Kayla to respond to email with QSI clarifying requirements for Cultural Resources Survey Permit
- GU to apply for ROW Application

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



North Plains Connector

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers & Grid United Meeting Notes

November 28, 2023

3:00 PM Central

Teams Meeting

Summary of Discussion

- Introduction of North Plains Connector (NPC) Project to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) (B. Johnson)
 - Introduction of meeting attendees
 - NPC Project overview – interconnecting eastern and western grids
 - Stakeholder engagement and coordination – agencies, tribes, landowners
 - NPC is a pilot project for the Department of Energy (DOE)
 - DOE is the lead federal agency
 - Schedule overview – filing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and state permits anticipated in 2024, and USACE pre-construction notification (PCN) in late 2024 or early 2025
 - Will want to discuss details/inputs and conditions from the USACE in draft NEPA Environmental Impact Statement
- Construction methods overview (W. Hammer)
 - Discussed construction sequence
 - J. Renschler: access roads have been a more common source of water resource impacts than structures on other transmission line projects
 - Design goal is to minimize impacts to wetlands/waterbodies
 - Intend to locate structures outside of wetlands/waterbodies where feasible
- Clean Water Act permitting strategy (W. Hammer)
 - No Section 10 waters crossed; Project will coordinate with state on sovereign waters
 - J. Renschler: notable waters listed on the slide would be jurisdictional to USACE
 - Avoidance is first goal, minimize ground disturbance wherever possible
 - Try to span wetlands/waterbodies
 - Intend to use monopoles in the design as much as possible
 - Very limited forested land conversion; very few forested wetlands along Project
 - May need to grade within certain wetlands/waters, but design will minimize
 - J. Renschler: Is lead federal agency bound by Executive Order 11990 for no net loss of wetlands?
 - B. Sherman/R.J. Boyle: DOE will be lead federal agency for NEPA; uncertain if no net loss applies here and will need to follow up
 - Will apply for Preliminary Jurisdictional Determination
 - Based on design goals, intend to stay within permit conditions of Nationwide Permit (NWP) 57



- Project anticipates submitting PCN due to Project size and general conditions related to Endangered Species Act (ESA), National Historical Preservation Act (NHPA), and Tribal concerns whether acreage trigger is met or not
 - J. Renschler: agreed that NWP 57 was preferred and would work with the Project to avoid an Individual Permit
- Discussed Regional Conditions to NWP 57 for North Dakota
 - J. Renschler: culvert best management practices (BMPs) were put in place for North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT); there is flexibility in the BMPs for culvert installations, based on what has been implemented on NDDOT projects
 - J. Renschler: USACE will follow state regarding blanket certification of 401
- J. Renschler: prefers using Form 4345, not 6082
- Tribal and Section 106 coordination (B. Johnson)
 - ~80% of field surveys complete (both archaeological and tribal surveys)
 - Will have follow up surveys in 2024
 - Project has had strong tribal engagement thus far
 - Tribal Cultural Specialists out in field with the rest of the survey crews
 - Tribal Historical Preservation Officers (THPOs) helping to draft reports for the Project
- Section 7 coordination (M. Voth)
 - USFWS – coordination during routing and with survey protocols
 - Only aquatic listed species with the potential to occur in the Project area is pallid sturgeon, which may occur in the Missouri River outside the Project area
 - J. Renschler: pallid sturgeon historically viewed as limited in North Dakota because of Missouri River dams; may have more occurrences in Yellowstone River and tributaries in Montana
- J. Renschler
 - ND USACE file number NWO-2022-1697-BIS
 - Will be North Dakota point of contact for USACE

Action Items

- DOE will set up a meeting with USACE staff in North Dakota and Montana

Attendee List

DOE: RJ Boyle, Ben Sherman

Grid United: Brant Johnson, DJ Worth, Toya Campbell

Merjent: Lindsey Churchill, Jeff Thommes

USACE: Jason Renschler

WEST: Maggie Voth, Wade Hammer

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North Dakota Department of Water Resources



North Plains Connector

North Dakota – Department of Water Resources Call Log

July 9, 2024

Attendees:

Amy Winkelman – North Dakota Department of Water Resources

Wade Hammer – Senior Biologist/Permitting Specialist, WEST

Call Summary:

7/9/2024 – 4:40 p.m. Central

Wade provided an introduction to the North Plains Connector Project (Project), including a the general description of the purpose and geographic extent of the Project. The call's purpose was to introduce the Project and to gain a better understanding of the process for applying for a sovereign lands crossing permit from the North Dakota Department of Water Resources (NDDWR).

Amy indicated she is the sovereign lands specialist and that her manager is Jerry Heiser, who was previously contacted in 2022 by the Project team. Amy indicated she is the person who initially coordinates review of the sovereign lands permit applications.

Amy confirmed that application form SFN 61408 is the correct form to use to submit an application to the NDDWR for a sovereign lands crossing permit. Amy recommended that each crossing should be treated as a separate permit application, even if the Project is crossing the same waterbody twice. If the Project changes at one crossing location, or requires alteration after the original authorization, permits at additional crossings of the same waterbody could require re-permitting if each crossing is not permitted separately.

Amy indicated that maps and dimensions are the key pieces of information in the application; both plan and profile views of each crossing should be provided. The location of structures and distance from the waterbody bank and ordinary high water mark (OHWM), and height of the conductors at from the waterbody are important pieces of information to provide. A description of the construction methods and potential impacts at the sovereign waterbody crossing are other key pieces of information. Amy indicated the information need not be incredibly detailed and the focus will be on the previously mentioned height from the waterbody and distance of structures from the waterbody bank.

Amy indicated that providing information in the application that outlines operations or maintenance activities that are foreseeable is a good idea. Once issued, the permit spans the life of the project and does not need to be renewed unless there is a change in the crossing location or if the crossing method (i.e., aerial versus buried) is altered. Therefore, there is not expiration of the permit unless the project plans change. If a pole needs to be replaced, for example, but the crossing location changes, there would be no need for an additional or revised permit. Therefore, providing information about clearing of vegetation or access may be useful so that activities within the waterbody required during operations are included in the permit. If



there are any questions about changes to the crossing, including clearance height, crossing location, or other key design elements, the NDDWR should be consulted to determine if a new permit is required.

The NDDWR coordinates review with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), North Dakota Department of Game and Fish, and North Dakota Department of Parks and Recreation. The agencies have 30 days to review materials. While these agencies may weigh in on other resources associated with the sovereign waterbody, the NDDWR is only focused on the land area within the OHWM. Typically, USACE wetland and waterbody delineation methods match what the NDDWR is looking for in terms of the OHWM, but the NDDWR requirements may vary slightly.

Wade indicated the application materials would likely be submitted early 2025, and that if there were any questions about the Project that Amy could contact him.

January 21, 2025

Ms. Donnie Joe Worth
Grid United
712 Main St
Suite 1000
Houston, Texas 77002
donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
(800) 856-2973

Dear Ms. Worth,

This is in response to your request for a review of the environmental impacts associated with the North Plains Connector Project, located in Golden Valley, Slope, Hettinger, Grant, Morton, and Oliver counties North Dakota.

The proposed project has been reviewed by Department of Water Resources (DWR), and the following comments are provided:

- Initial review indicates the project does not require a conditional or temporary permit for water appropriation. However, if surface water or groundwater will be diverted for construction of any future projects identified in the plan, a water permit will be required per North Dakota Century Code § 61-04-02. Please consult with the DWR Water Appropriation Division if you have any questions at (701) 328-2754 or appropinfo@nd.gov.
- The DWR maintains a network of observation wells across the state for monitoring the water levels and quality in glacial and bedrock aquifers. These wells are often installed in road and highway rights-of-way to limit inconvenience to the adjacent landowners. DWR observation wells have a yellow protective casing extending between 1 and 3 feet above ground surface, and their locations are marked with a stake. If an observation well is encountered during project activities and must be removed, please contact the Water Appropriation Division. The DWR hopes to keep all observation wells, but otherwise will ensure the well is properly abandoned.
- Any work that takes place within or changes are made to a previously constructed structure within the ordinary high water mark (OHWM) of a navigable waterbody in North Dakota, including the Heart River and Cannonball River, will require prior authorization from DWR. This includes overhead transmission lines and bored utility lines. For further information, feel free to contact DWR's Sovereign Land Manager, Jerry Heiser at 701-328-4935 or gheiser@nd.gov. You can also contact our Sovereign Land Specialist at 701-328-4988 or awinkelman@nd.gov.
- There is a FEMA National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) regulatory floodplain identified or mapped where this proposed project is to take place. Impacted areas are designated to be in NFIP Zone AE. The State of North Dakota has no formal NFIP permitting authority, as all NFIP permitting decisions are considered by impacted NFIP participating communities, which is the community with zoning authority for the area in question. Please work directly with the local floodplain administrator of the zoning authority impacted to achieve NFIP and community compliance.
- The DWR Regulatory Division's Engineering and Permitting Section and Water Resource Districts are responsible for regulating drainage and water management in North Dakota. The DWR Engineering and Permitting Section also regulates the

construction and modification of any dike, diversion, restoration, or other device. Consequently, the DWR requests to be notified regarding a proposed project's impacts, if any, to water resources, such as watercourses (i.e. streams or rivers), agricultural surface drains, wetlands (i.e. ponds, sloughs, lakes, or any series thereof) with a contributing watershed area of 80 acres or more, and dikes, diversions, restorations, and other water control devices, as any alterations, modifications, improvements, or impacts may require a drainage permit(s) or construction permit(s). For more information on these requirements, please visit the Regulation & Appropriation tab on the DWR website (dwr.nd.gov) or contact the Regulatory Division directly at 701-328-2750 or dwrregpermits@nd.gov.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide review comments. Should you have further questions, please contact me at 701-328-4970 or kyrkoski@nd.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kyle Yrkoski", followed by a vertical line.

Kyle Yrkoski
Planner III

KY:mg/1570



North Plains Connector

North Dakota Department of Water Resources; Sovereign Lands

Meeting Notes

January 13, 2026

In-person Meeting (1200 Memorial Hwy, Bank of North Dakota Building, Bismarck, North Dakota)

Attendee List

North Dakota Department of Water Resources, Sovereign Land Department: Amy Winkelman (Manager), Travis Thyberg

Grid United: Jennifer Stelzleni (Senior Manager, Environment)

WEST: Wade Hammer (Senior Biologist)

Meeting Objective

Representatives of the North Plains Connector Project (Project), a proposed electrical transmission line project in North Dakota and Montana, met in person with the North Dakota Department of Water Resources (NDDWR) to review whether the Project will require a Sovereign Land permit for proposed waterbody crossings. A permit is needed when construction occurs partially or entirely within the Ordinary High-Water Mark (OHWM) of a navigable waterbody, as the State of North Dakota owns streambeds, islands, and other areas lying within the OHWM of navigable lakes and streams.

Summary of Discussion

The Project team provided an overview of the Project purpose along with a high-level summary of the Project schedule.

Applicability of Sovereign Land Permitting to the Project

- NDDWR confirmed that the limit of its jurisdiction extends upstream to the point where a waterbody transitions from perennial to seasonal flow. NDDWR has not yet delineated the State's navigable waters. According to NDDWR, the presence of a culvert does not necessarily preclude it from being considered navigable.
- Meeting attendees reviewed the proposed Project route, as well as the proposed crossing of the Heart River and multiple crossings (both overhead and direct) of the Cannonball River. The meeting attendees agreed that a permit application is needed for the proposed crossing of the Heart River because this segment of the river is clearly considered navigable.
- Because NDDWR cannot advise on which sections of the Cannonball River that it considers navigable, the agency recommends that the Project apply for authorization for all proposed Cannonball River crossings. However, if the Project were to take this approach, the team is unable to determine the upstream extent of the Cannonball River using the publicly available U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) mapping.



- NDDWR acknowledged the Project's concern about over-permitting and expressed openness to more flexible submission approaches. For example, the meeting attendees discussed permitting a defined area around each crossing and allowing multiple crossing-type options within the application to avoid design constraints or the need for future permit amendments.
- NDDWR confirmed that when waterbody crossings are direct, it will permit both temporary and permanent installations. The agency also indicated a preference for bridged crossings over culverted ones.

Sovereign Land Permit Application Requirements

- Much of the information discussed aligned with previous conversations between the parties regarding application contents, and review process. Application contents are to include a complete NDDWR form (*Authorization to Construct a Project Within Sovereign Lands of North Dakota, form SFN 61408*) and supporting maps with (1) location and identifier for the proposed waterbody crossing that is subject to a permit, (2) distance from OHWM on each waterbody bank to the closest project feature, and (3) distance from the water surface at OHWM on each waterbody bank to the lowest point of overhead electric line sag. NDDWR confirmed that the maps do not need to be stamped by an engineer.
- After NDDWR receives an application, it will request comments from local, state, and federal agencies. NDDWR confirmed that the application would warrant a staff-level review and does not require public notice.
- Separate permit applications should be submitted for proposed crossings on independent waterbodies. For a waterbody where multiple crossings are proposed, it is NDDWR's preference to receive one application for all overhead crossings and a separate application for all direct crossings.

Sovereign Land Permit Application Timing

- NDDWR has a backlog of permit applications and indicated a minimum of 120 days needed for processing.
- The agency comment period (30 days) would be included within this 120-day timeframe. Receipt of a permit from NDDWR is not contingent on the agency comments.

Action Items:

- A. Winkelman to coordinate an internal review to provide clarity on the Cannonball River extent and potential navigability.
- W. Hammer to provide A. Winkelman a pdf map of the Project route overlaid on USGS waterbody mapping to support NDDWR's internal review.

J – 7

North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality

January 9, 2025

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director
Grid United LLC
712 Main St., Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77002

Re: North Plains Connector Between Rosebud County, Montana and Golden Valley, Grant, Hettinger, Morton, Oliver, and Slope Counties in North Dakota

Dear Mr. Worth:

The North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (Department) has reviewed the information concerning the above-referenced project received at the Department on December 27, 2024, with respect to possible environmental impacts.

1. Necessary measures should be taken to minimize fugitive dust emissions created during construction activities. Any complaints that may arise should be dealt with in an efficient and effective manner.
2. Care is to be taken during construction activity near any water of the state to minimize adverse effects on a water body. This includes minimal disturbance of stream beds and banks to prevent excess siltation, and the replacement and revegetation of any disturbed area as soon as possible after work has been completed. Caution must also be taken to prevent spills of oil and grease that may reach the receiving water from equipment maintenance and/or the handling of fuels on the site. Guidelines for minimizing degradation to waterways during construction are attached.
3. Projects disturbing one or more acres are required to have a construction stormwater permit to discharge runoff until the site is stabilized by the re-establishment of vegetation or other permanent cover. Projects disturbing less than one acre also are required to have a construction stormwater permit if the project is part of a larger common plan of development or sale, and the larger common plan ultimately disturbs one or more acres. Cities, counties, or the North Dakota Department of Transportation may require additional sediment and erosion control measures for construction activity affecting their storm drainage system. Check with the local officials to be sure local stormwater and dewatering management considerations are addressed.

Projects that discharge to a water body that has a total maximum daily load (TMDL) allocation or is listed as impaired under Section 303(d) of the Federal CWA (303(d) list) must ensure construction activity does not affect the water body. The Cannonball River and

Dead Horse Creek (Slope and Hettinger County) have a TMDL allocation for E. coli bacteria. North Cedar Creek (Slope County) and Square Butte Creek (Morton County) are listed as impaired for sediment in the 2020-2022 North Dakota Section 303(d) list. Deep Creek (Slope County) is listed as impaired for dissolved oxygen and Thirty Mile Creek (Hettinger County) is impaired based on bioassessments. The following water bodies are listed as impaired for E. coli or fecal coliform bacteria: Little Missouri River (Slope County), North Cedar Creek (Slope County), Thirty Mile Creek (Hettinger County), Heart River (Morton County), and Square Butte Creek (Morton County).

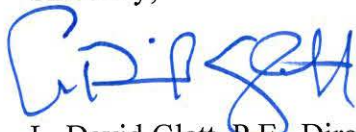
Further information on the stormwater permit and the location and description of TMDL allocations and 303(d) list water bodies may be obtained from the Department's website or by calling the Division of Water Quality at 701-328-5210.

4. The proposed and alternative construction projects may include individual projects located within Oliver, Morton, Grant, Hettinger, Slope, and Golden Valley counties. It is possible that some projects may be located over defined glacial drift aquifers, defined sensitive groundwater areas, or within wellhead or source water protection areas. Care should be taken to avoid spills of any materials that may have an adverse effect on groundwater quality. All spills must be immediately reported to this Department and appropriate remedial actions performed.
5. All solid waste materials must be managed and transported in accordance with the state's solid and hazardous waste rules. Appropriate efforts to reduce, reuse and/or recycle waste materials are strongly encouraged. As appropriate, segregation of inert waste from non-inert waste can generally reduce the cost of waste management. Further information on waste management and recycling is available from the Department's Division of Waste Management at 701-328-5166.

The Department owns no land in or adjacent to the proposed improvements, nor does it have any projects scheduled in the area. In addition, we believe the proposed activities are consistent with the State Implementation Plan for the Control of Air Pollution for the State of North Dakota.

If you have any questions regarding our comments, please feel free to contact this office.

Sincerely,



L. David Glatt, P.E., Director
North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality

LDG:ll
Attach.

Construction and Environmental Disturbance Requirements

The following are the minimum requirements of the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (Department) for projects that involve construction and environmental disturbance in or near waters of the State of North Dakota. They ensure that minimal environmental degradation occurs as a result of construction or related work which has the potential to affect waters of the state. All projects must be constructed to minimize the loss of soil, vegetative cover, and pollutants (chemical or biological) from a site.

Soils

Prevent the erosion and sediment loss using erosion and sediment controls. Fragile and sensitive areas such as wetlands, riparian zones, delicate flora, and land resources must be prohibited against compaction, vegetation loss and unnecessary damage.

Surface Waters

All construction must be managed to minimize impacts to aquatic systems. Follow safe storage and handling procedures to prevent the contamination of water from fuel spills, lubricants, and chemicals. Stream bank and stream bed disturbances must be contained to minimize silt movement, nutrient upsurges, plant dislocations, and any physical chemicals, or biological disruption. The use of pesticides or herbicides in or near surface waters is allowed under the Department's pesticide application permit with notification to the Department.

Fill Material

Any fill material placed below the ordinary high-water mark must be free of topsoil, decomposable materials, and persistent synthetic organic compounds, including, but not limited to, asphalt, tires, treated lumber, and construction debris. The Department may require testing of fill material. All temporary fills must be removed. Debris and solid waste must be properly disposed or recycled. Impacted areas must be restored to near original condition.

J – 8

North Dakota Geological Survey

From: [Donnie Joe Worth](#)
To: [Anderson, Fred J.](#)
Cc: [Lindsey Churchill](#)
Subject: EXTERNAL: RE: N.D. Geological Survey Comments - Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project
Date: Thursday, January 2, 2025 12:50:13 PM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Merjent.

Mr. Anderson,

Response received. We will follow up if we have any questions or comments.

Thank you!

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Anderson, Fred J. <fjanderson@nd.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 30, 2024 2:42 PM
To: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Subject: N.D. Geological Survey Comments - Notification of the Proposed North Plains Connector Project

You don't often get email from fjanderson@nd.gov. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: This message was sent from outside the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Mr. Worth,

Thank you for the notice of the proposed electrical infrastructure project proposed in southwestern North Dakota.

The project routes and corridor pass through areas where landslides have been mapped previously, particularly in Golden Valley, Slope, Grant, Morton, and Oliver Counties .

These are areas that would best be avoided when placing surface structures such as transmission line towers, etc.

Access to our landslide maps and data sets for use in route and corridor evaluations can be found on our website here: <https://www.dmr.nd.gov/dmr/ndgs/landslides>

Please contact us if there are any additional questions or comments.

Regards,

Fred J. Anderson

Geologist

701.328.8000 (O) . fjanderson@nd.gov . www.dmr.nd.gov

N O R T H
Dakota | Mineral Resources
Be Legendary.™

J – 9

North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department

From: [Donnie Joe Worth](#)
To: [Dirk, Christine](#)
Cc: [Lindsey Churchill](#); [Denisha Cummings](#)
Subject: EXTERNAL: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area
Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 4:41:12 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Merjent.

Christine,

I wanted to follow up to check if you received the KMZ and see if you have any questions.

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Donnie Joe Worth
Sent: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 2:42 PM
To: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

Christine,

I wanted to follow up on my previous message. Attached is a KMZ of North Plains Connector data. Please let me know if you are able to receive the attachment.

Thank you!

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Donnie Joe Worth
Sent: Tuesday, February 11, 2025 6:50 PM

To: 'Dirk, Christine' <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

Christine,

Unfortunately that is not working for me. Do you have another file sharing process we can follow?

Thank you for your help.

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 11, 2025 10:01 AM
To: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

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Hi. Usually we can trick the system by renaming if from a .zip to a .piz.

From: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2025 11:58 AM
To: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

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Christine,

The following message was blocked. Is there another way (via Dropbox, SharePoint, etc.) that we can transfer these shapefiles?

Thank you,
DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Donnie Joe Worth
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2025 10:38 AM
To: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

Christine,

Attached are the requested shapefiles for North Plains Connector.

Thank you!
DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Donnie Joe Worth
Sent: Tuesday, January 21, 2025 1:08 PM
To: 'Dirk, Christine' <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

Christine – a response after we share shapefile sounds like a suitable plan. Thank you!

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 7:47 AM
To: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

You don't often get email from cdirk@nd.gov. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Thanks DJ. From the scale of the map that was sent, it looks like there are no ND Parks and Recreation Department properties within the project area. However, without more specific project location boundaries I can't say for sure. We also maintain a database on known locations of plant, animal and natural communities of concern and we maintain a database on the locations of Land and Water Conservation project boundaries. I won't be able to include those findings until I have the shapefile.

There was no deadline on the notification. Would it be possible for us to wait on a response until we have the shapefile?

Chris

From: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2025 2:52 PM
To: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Subject: RE: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

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Christine,

Confirming receipt of your email. In approximately a month, we can provide a shapefile of the North Plains Connector Project.

Thank you,

DJ

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Project Development Director

(832) 364-4455 | donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com
712 Main St Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77002



From: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 7, 2025 9:52 AM
To: Donnie Joe Worth <donniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Subject: More information for Proposed North Plains Connector Project - ND study area

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Hello Donnie Joe. I am working on the review for the ND study area of the Proposed North Plains Connector project. Do you have a GIS file or Google Earth file of the study area that you could share with me?

Christine Dirk
GIS Specialist

701.328.5368 • parkrec.nd.gov





RE: ND Natural Heritage data request

From Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>
Date Mon 3/17/2025 15:12
To Kirsten Frahm <kfrahm@west-inc.com>

 3 attachments (1 MB)

West_KirstenFrahm_NPC_R25-01.pdf; West_KirstenFrahm_NPC_LWCF_DS25-01.pdf; West_KirstenFrahm_NPC_R25-01.piz;

Hello,

I've attached the requested data. The zip file (please rename it to a .zip) contains shapefiles of species of concern & significant ecological communities, Land and Water Conservation Fund projects, and NDPRD properties within the project boundary shapefile you provided. It also contains information about the species and field names in the shapefiles.

It is our policy to require the recipient of an electronic data transfer and/or spatial data transfer to sign an agreement for the release of data. Please read through the attached agreements and send a signed version to our office. Upon receipt the NDNHI coordinator and LWCF coordinator will also sign the agreement. A copy of this finalized versions will be sent to your office for your records.

If you have outside companies that would also like the information, please have them contact me and I will send them the same package of information.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Christine Dirk

GIS Specialist

701.328.5368 • parkrec.nd.gov



From: Kirsten Frahm <kfrahm@west-inc.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 6, 2025 4:37 PM
To: Dirk, Christine <cdirk@nd.gov>; Duttenhefner, Kathleen G. <kgduttenehfer@nd.gov>

Cc: Maggie Voth <mvoth@west-inc.com>

Subject: ND Natural Heritage data request

Some people who received this message don't often get email from kfrahm@west-inc.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

***** **CAUTION:** This email originated from an outside source. Do not click links or open attachments unless you know they are safe. *****

Hi Christine,

I called and left a voicemail for you this afternoon to follow up on our request for updated occurrence data for species of concern and significant ecological communities near the North Plains Connector Project. Do you have a likely ETA for when this data may be available to us? Additionally, we would like to request permission to share this data with Project team members outside of WEST and are wondering what the process would be for doing so.

Thank you,
Kirsten Frahm



Innovative Solutions
Through Applied Science

Kirsten Frahm, MS

Associate Biologist, Herpetologist
(she/her)

c: [612-750-5295](tel:612-750-5295) **w:** [307-823-1433](tel:307-823-1433)

e: kfrahm@west-inc.com

a: 7575 Golden Valley Road, Suite 300, Golden Valley, MN 55427



From: Kirsten Frahm <kfrahm@west-inc.com>

Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2025 16:18

To: cdirk@nd.gov <cdirk@nd.gov>; kgduttonhefner@nd.gov <kgduttonhefner@nd.gov>

Cc: Maggie Voth <mvoth@west-inc.com>

Subject: ND Natural Heritage data request

Hi Christine,

I am following up about the data request for the North Plains Connector Project sent on February 4, which included a request for updated GIS occurrence data for species of concern and significant ecological communities near the Project. We need to receive the data by next week, so I have included Kathy Duttonhefner here too in case you have been out. Attached to this email is the shapefile that includes a 10-mile buffer of the Project.

As mentioned in my previous email, we would also like to request permission to share this data with Project team members outside of WEST. What would be the process for doing so?

Please kindly respond to this email by the end of day Friday (2/28) to confirm you have received this request. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Kirsten Frahm



Innovative Solutions
Through Applied Science

Kirsten Frahm, MS
Associate Biologist, Herpetologist
(she/her)

c: [612-750-5295](tel:612-750-5295) w: [307-823-1433](tel:307-823-1433)

e: kfrahm@west-inc.com

a: 7575 Golden Valley Road, Suite 300, Golden Valley, MN 55427



From: Kirsten Frahm <kfrahm@west-inc.com>
Sent: Friday, February 21, 2025 08:45
To: cdirk@nd.gov <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Maggie Voth <mvoth@west-inc.com>
Subject: ND Natural Heritage data request

Hi Christine,

I am following up about the data request for the North Plains Connector Project sent on February 4. Do you have a likely ETA when this may be available?

As mentioned in my previous email, we would also like to request permission to share this data with Project team members outside of WEST. What would be the process for doing so?

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Kirsten Frahm



Innovative Solutions
Through Applied Science

Kirsten Frahm, MS
Associate Biologist, Herpetologist
(she/her)

c: [612-750-5295](tel:612-750-5295) w: [307-823-1433](tel:307-823-1433)

e: kfrahm@west-inc.com

a: 7575 Golden Valley Road, Suite 300, Golden Valley, MN 55427



From: Kirsten Frahm <kfrahm@west-inc.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 2:11:23 PM
To: cdirk@nd.gov <cdirk@nd.gov>
Cc: Maggie Voth <mvoth@west-inc.com>
Subject: ND Natural Heritage data request

Hi Christine,

I am working with Maggie Voth on the North Plains Connector Project and would like to request updated GIS occurrence data for species of concern and significant ecological communities near the Project. Attached to this email is a shapefile that includes a 10-mile buffer of the Project.

We would also like to request permission to share this data with Project team members outside of WEST. What would be the process for doing so?

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Kirsten



Environmental &
Statistical Consultants

Kirsten Frahm, MS

Associate Biologist, Herpetologist
(she/her)

c: [612-750-5295](tel:612-750-5295) w: [307-823-1433](tel:307-823-1433)

e: kfracm@west-inc.com

a: 7575 Golden Valley Road, Suite 300, Golden Valley, MN 55427



J – 10

Natural Resources Conservation Service



January 24, 2025

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Bismarck State Office
PO Box 1458
Bismarck, ND
58502-1458

Voice 701.530.2000
Fax 855-813-7556

DJ Worth
Project Development Director
Grid United
712 Main St, Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Mr. Worth:

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has reviewed your letter December 23, 2024, regarding the Proposed North Plains Connector Project in Golden Valley, Slope, Hettinger, Grant, Oliver and Morton Counties of North Dakota.

Farmland Protection Policy Act

NRCS has a major responsibility with the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) in documenting conversion of farmland (i.e., Prime, Statewide Importance and/or Local Importance) to non-agricultural use when a federal funding source is utilized. It appears the proposed project is not supported by federal funding; therefore, FPPA does not apply, and no further action is needed.

Wetlands

The Wetland Conservation Provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended, provide that if a USDA participant converts a wetland for the purpose or to have the effect of making agricultural production possible, loss of USDA benefits could occur. NRCS has developed the following guidelines for the installation of permanent structures where wetlands occur. If these guidelines are followed the impacts to the wetland will be considered minimal allowing USDA participants to continue to receive USDA benefits. Following are the requirements:

- Disturbance to the wetland must be temporary.
- No drainage of wetland is allowed (temporary or permanent).
- Mechanized landscaping necessary for installation is kept to a minimum and preconstruction contours are maintained.
- Temporary side cast material must be placed in such a manner not to be dispersed in the wetland.
- All trenches must be backfilled to the original wetland bottom elevation.

NRCS recommends that the transmission system be designed and installed to avoid impacts to wetlands.

Helping People Help the Land

If you have additional questions pertaining to FPPA, please contact Lance Duey, Assistant State Soil Scientist, NRCS, Bismarck, North Dakota, at (701) 530-2109.

Sincerely,

Susan Samson-Liebig

SUSAN SAMSON-LIEBIG
Acting State Soil Scientist

From: [Duey, Lance - FPAC-NRCS, ND](#)
To: [Lindsey Churchill](#)
Cc: [Donnie Joe Worth](#); [Samson-Liebig, Susan - FPAC-NRCS, ND](#); [Weiser, Hal \(CTR\) - FPAC-NRCS, ND](#)
Subject: EXTERNAL: RE: [External Email]NPC - PSC letter response to NRCS
Date: Friday, April 11, 2025 4:20:49 PM
Attachments: [image003.png](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Merjent.

Lindsey:

Thank you for the information.

Lance Duey
Assistant State Soil Scientist
North Dakota State Office



Natural Resources Conservation Service
PO Box 1458, 220 East Rosser Ave, Bismarck, ND, 58502
p: (701) 530-2109 | c: (701) 934-1359

From: Lindsey Churchill <lindsey.churchill@merjent.com>
Sent: Friday, April 11, 2025 12:43 PM
To: Duey, Lance - FPAC-NRCS, ND <lance.duey@usda.gov>
Cc: Donnie Joe Worth <dunniejoe.worth@gridunited.com>
Subject: [External Email]NPC - PSC letter response to NRCS

You don't often get email from lindsey.churchill@merjent.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

[External Email]

If this message comes from an **unexpected sender** or references a **vague/unexpected topic**;
Use caution before clicking links or opening attachments.
Please send any concerns or suspicious messages to: Spam.Abuse@usda.gov

Lance,

North Plains received the attached response letter dated January 24, 2025 regarding the North Plains Connector Project (Project). I wanted to send a clarification that the Project may receive federal funding. Through the Montana Department of Commerce, the Project was awarded approximately \$605 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) through the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) Program under Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) 3195. Although the award was announced in July of 2024, the funding has not yet been provided by the DOE. Should the DOE move forward with the GRIP funding, we understand that FPPA may apply to the Project. We anticipate DOE will perform additional notice to agencies to confirm the scope of its GRIP funding action and describe any necessary

environmental review.

Regards,

Lindsey Churchill, PhD

Bismarck, North Dakota

651.428.7398 mobile

lindsey.churchill@merjent.com



1 Main Street SE, Suite 300

Minneapolis, MN 55414

612.746.3660 main

www.merjent.com

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J – 11

North Dakota Transmission Authority



INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION OF NORTH DAKOTA
NORTH DAKOTA TRANSMISSION AUTHORITY

Governor
Kelly Armstrong
Attorney General
Drew H. Wrigley
Agriculture Commissioner
Doug Goehring

North Dakota Public Service Commission

Mr. Steven Kahl, Executive Secretary
600 East Boulevard Ave, Dept. 408
Bismarck, ND 58505

December 11, 2025

RE: North Plains Connector LLC Statement of Support

On behalf of the North Dakota Transmission Authority (“NDTA”), we express strong support for the North Plains Connector (“NPC”) interregional transmission project. Established by the North Dakota Legislature, NDTA’s mission is to ensure the state’s abundant energy resources to serve growing regional and national demand. Today’s unprecedented load growth from data centers, advanced manufacturing, and electrification creates an urgent need for robust transmission solutions.

NPC is a 3,000 MW high-voltage direct current transmission line connecting Colstrip, Montana, to both SPP and MISO in North Dakota. As the first project to enable this level of controllable, bidirectional transfer capability between the Western and Eastern Interconnections, it will meaningfully strengthen grid stability, operational flexibility, and reliability for North Dakota and the broader region.

The Department of Energy has already recognized the project’s importance, as have our state’s Governor, Agriculture Commissioner, and Attorney General. They provided support for NPC’s application under the Department of Energy’s Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships program to help secure significant federal support for the project, underscoring its national significance and the critical role it will play in strengthening interregional transmission.

There is a clear and urgent need for new transmission to support large-load growth and maintain system reliability. NPC directly addresses this need by relieving congestion, expanding export capability, and strengthening North Dakota’s ability to deliver generation to regional markets. Long haul high-voltage direct current transmission will be essential to the future electric system, providing dependable transfer capability across regions with different resource mixes and enhancing resilience during extreme weather events. As North Dakota’s load grows, our connection to the greater grid is increasingly important, both to support our expanding energy needs and to ensure reliable imports should an adverse generation event occur with ND generation. NDTA views the North Plains Connector as vital to North Dakota’s long-term reliability objectives and respectfully supports its approval.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Claire Vigesaa in black ink.

Claire Vigesaa
Executive Director
North Dakota Transmission Authority



North Dakota Transmission Authority
Claire Vigesaa Executive Director
600 East Boulevard Avenue – Department 405 - Bismarck, ND 58505-0840
E-Mail: Claire.Vigesaa@NDTransmissionAuthority.com PHONE: 406-489-3881

J – 12

National Park Service



North Plains Connector

NPS, Grid United Meeting Notes

October 15, 2021
10:00 AM MT
Teams Meeting

General

- NPS would need tower heights, spacing for visual impact analysis (if close enough to NPS parks/sites)
- Bighorn sheep in badlands may be a concern for wildlife agencies

Theodore Roosevelt National Park (TRNP)

- Farther from TRNP is better
- Current routes may only have minimal impacts to Park (depending on topography)
- Painted Canyon Overlook and Buck Hill are critical viewsheds for TRNP
- Southern routes preferred
- In general, keep routes over 5 miles from TRNP to completely avoid viewshed impacts, certain topography may allow for closer routes

Knife River Indian Villages (KRIV) National Historic Site

- Tribes concerned with projects in proximity to KRIV
- Tribes prefer dark night skies, are sensitive to blinking lights, light pollution
- Visual impacts if near KRIV
- Alisha Deegan – superintendent for KRIV, may assist with KRIV consultation and tribal outreach if needed
- If the route doesn't cross the Missouri River, likely no significant impacts to KRIV

Action Items

- Grid United to follow up as routes are finalized
- Chad Sexton – primary NPS contact for project
- Wendy Ross – TRNP will have new superintendent in November, but will continue as a regional director overseeing NPS in ND

Attendee List

Wendy Ross – NPS
Chad Sexton – NPS
Brant Johnson – Grid United
Luke Martinson – WEST
Lindsey Churchill – Merjent

J – 13

State Historical Society of North Dakota



January 2, 2025

Donnie Joe (DJ) Worth
Grid United
712 Main St, Ste 1000
Houston, TX 77002

SHSND Ref.: 25-9017 North Plains Connector Project in Golden Valley, Grant, Hettinger, Morton, Oliver, and Slope Counties, North Dakota

Dear DJ,

We reviewed SHSND Ref.: 25-9017 North Plains Connector Project in Golden Valley, Grant, Hettinger, Morton, Oliver, and Slope Counties, North Dakota. We recommend a Class III (pedestrian survey) of cultural resources in the project area. The survey must follow "North Dakota SHPO Guidelines Manual for Cultural Resource Inventory Projects," which is available at <https://www.history.nd.gov/hp/hpforms.html>.

We have had previous correspondence with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), who we understand is the lead agency for the review of this project under federal laws, regarding this project (under SHPO Ref. #22-5249). The survey and protocols we consulted on with the DOE will be sufficient for our review under North Dakota laws and it is our understanding this work has already begun. For correspondence related to the review under state law, please include our State Historical Society of North Dakota reference number: 25-9017.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this project to date. We look forward to review of the Class III survey for archaeological resources. If you have any questions please contact Lorna Meidinger, Lead Historic Preservation Specialist at (701) 328-2089 or lbmeidinger@nd.gov.

Sincerely,

for William D. Peterson, PhD
Director, State Historical Society of North Dakota

25-9017

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Tribal Outreach



**Three Affiliated Tribes - MHA Nation
Tribal Historic Preservation Office
Mailing: 307 5th Ave, New Town, ND 58763
Physical: MHA Interpretive Center
9386 Hwy 23 Lake Sakakawea Rd, New Town, ND 58763**

To: North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 E Boulevard Ave, Dept 408
Bismarck, ND 58505-0480

Subject: Letter of Support for the North Plains Connector Transmission Project

Dear Commissioners,

We the MHA Nation write to express our support for the North Plains Connector transmission project North Plains Connector being developed by North Plains Connector LLC (North Plains). We commend the Project because it represents a way that developers can both strengthen the region's energy infrastructure and remain thoughtful and respectful of Tribal Nations and Tribal resources.

In its earliest stages, North Plains began to identify and coordinate with potentially impacted Tribal Nations. And communications have been clear and consistent throughout the planning and permitting phases. Specifically, North Plains Tribal engagement efforts have included:

- North Plains conducted early mapping of Tribal lands and resource to identify potentially impacted Tribal Nations – including Tribal treaty areas and areas of ancestral interest.
- In 2022, as siting and field survey initiated, North Plains established a Tribal Engagement Team (TET) to engage in an ongoing dialogue that would identify and minimize negative impacts of the Project on Tribal resources and increase benefits to our Tribal community.
- North Plains and the TET closely coordinated with our Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) to ensure that Tribal resource expertise was included in the site design.
- North Plains engaged Tribal Cultural Specialists (TCS), identified by the THPO, to survey for Tribal resources on potential Project routes. The TCSs worked alongside typical archeological and environmental experts in the field and were compensated for their expertise and input.



Three Affiliated Tribes - MHA Nation
Tribal Historic Preservation Office
Mailing: 307 5th Ave, New Town, ND 58763
Physical: MHA Interpretive Center
9386 Hwy 23 Lake Sakakawea Rd, New Town, ND 58763

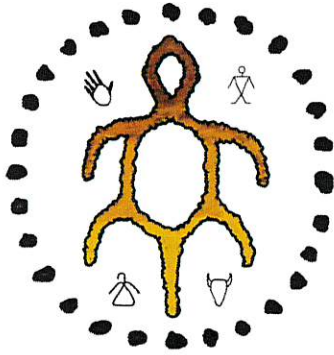
- Where significant resources were identified, North Plains provided the opportunity for site visits for the THPO and other Tribal officials.
- North Plains and the Tribe agreed to standard off-sets and buffer zones for all Tribal resources identified by TCSs during survey. And where standard avoidance measures were not feasible or were insufficient for the identified resource(s), the project facilitated meaningful dialogue, listened to our concerns, and incorporated our feedback into Project planning.

North Plain's early-and-often collaborative approach is a positive example of Tribal engagement. We urge the Commission to approve the Project's siting application and allow the timely advancement of this vital infrastructure project. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Allan Demaray, Director & THP Officer

TAT- Tribal Historic Preservation Office
CELL 701.421.6640
ademaray@mhanation.com
MHA Nation



Tribal Historic Preservation Office

P.O. Box 509

Agency Village, SD 57262

(605) 698-3584 phone

September 23, 2025

North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 E Boulevard Ave, Dept 408
Bismarck, ND 58505-0480

Re: Letter of Support for the North Plains Connector Transmission Project

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing with regard to the above mentioned project. The Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate write to express our support for the North Plains Connector transmission project North Plains Connector being developed by North Plains Connector LLC (North Plains). We commend the Project because it represents a way that developers can both strengthen the region's energy infrastructure and remain considerate and respectful of Tribal Nations and Tribal resources.

Through early consultation, North Plains began to identify and coordinate with potentially impacted Tribal Nations. Throughout the project there has been great effort to maintain open and consistent communications with the tribes. Communications have been clear throughout the planning and permitting phases.

Specifically, North Plains Tribal engagement efforts have included:

- North Plains conducted early mapping of Tribal lands and resource to identify potentially impacted Tribal Nations – including Tribal treaty areas and areas of ancestral interest.
- In 2022, as siting and field survey initiated, North Plains established a Tribal Engagement Team (TET) to engage in an ongoing dialogue that would identify and minimize negative impacts of the Project on Tribal resources and increase benefits to our Tribal community.
- North Plains and the TET closely coordinated with our Tribal Historic Preservation Office's (THPO) to ensure that Tribal resource expertise was included in the site design.

- North Plains engaged Tribal Cultural Specialists (TCS), identified by the THPO, to survey for Tribal resources on potential Project routes. The TCSs worked alongside archeological and environmental experts in the field and were compensated for their expertise and input.
- Where significant resources were identified, North Plains provided the opportunity for site visits for the THPO and other Tribal officials.
- North Plains and the Tribe agreed to standard off-sets and buffer zones for all Tribal resources identified by TCSs during survey. And where standard avoidance measures were not feasible or were insufficient for the identified resource(s), the project facilitated meaningful dialogue, listened to our concerns, and incorporated our feedback into Project planning.

North Plain's early-and-often collaborative approach is a positive example of Tribal engagement. We urge the Commission to approve the Project's siting application and allow the timely advancement of this vital infrastructure project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dianne Desrosiers, THPO
Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate

Spirit Lake Tribal Historic Preservation Office

PO Box 198 Ft. Totten, ND 58335 PH 701.766.4031 FAX 701.766.4053



KENNETH GRAYWATER, JR.

THPO Officer

701.766.4031

Cell 701.381.2009

Email: KJGraywater@spiritlakenation.com

SUSIE FOX

Administrative Assistant/FCC Specialist

701.230.2133

Email: sfox@gondtc.com

To: North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 E Boulevard Ave, Dept 408
Bismarck, ND 58505-0480

Subject: Letter of Support for the North Plains Connector Transmission Project
Dear Commissioners,

I the Spirit Lake Tribe THPO write to express my support for the North Plains Connector transmission project North Plains Connector being developed by North Plains Connector LLC (North Plains). I commend the Project because it represents a way that developers can both strengthen the region's energy infrastructure and remain thoughtful and respectful of Tribal Nations and Tribal resources.

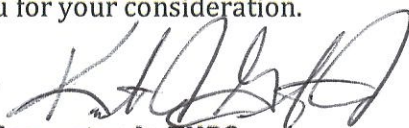
In its earliest stages, North Plains began to identify and coordinate with potentially impacted Tribal Nations. And communications have been clear and consistent throughout the planning and permitting phases. Specifically, North Plains Tribal engagement efforts have included:

- North Plains conducted early mapping of Tribal lands and resource to identify potentially impacted Tribal Nations – including Tribal treaty areas and areas of ancestral interest.
- In 2022, as siting and field survey initiated, North Plains established a Tribal Engagement Team (TET) to engage in an ongoing dialogue that would identify and minimize negative impacts of the Project on Tribal resources and increase benefits to our Tribal community.
- North Plains and the TET closely coordinated with our Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) to ensure that Tribal resource expertise was included in the site design.
- North Plains engaged Tribal Cultural Specialists (TCS), identified by the THPO, to survey for Tribal resources on potential Project routes. The TCSs worked alongside typical archeological and environmental experts in the field and were compensated for their expertise and input.
- Where significant resources were identified, North Plains provided the opportunity for site visits for the THPO and other Tribal officials.
- North Plains and the Tribe agreed to standard off-sets and buffer zones for all Tribal resources identified by TCSs during survey. And where standard avoidance measures were not feasible or were insufficient for the identified resource(s), the project facilitated meaningful dialogue, listened to our concerns, and incorporated our feedback into Project planning.

North Plains' early-and-often collaborative approach is a positive example of Tribal engagement. We urge the Commission to approve the Project's siting application and allow the timely advancement of this vital infrastructure project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Kenneth Graywater, Jr. THPO
Spirit Lake Tribe



T RIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
S TANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE
Administrative Service Center
North Standing Rock Avenue
Fort Yates, N.D. 58538
Tel: (701) 854-2120
Fax: (701) 854-2138

To: North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 E Boulevard Ave, Dept 408
Bismarck, ND 58505-0480

Subject: Letter of Support for the North Plains Connector Transmission Project

Dear Commissioners,

We the Standing Rock Nation write to express our support for the North Plains Connector transmission project (Project) being developed by North Plains Connector LLC (North Plains). We commend the Project because it represents a way that developers can both strengthen the region's energy infrastructure and remain thoughtful and respectful of Tribal Nations and Tribal resources.

In its earliest stages, North Plains began to identify and coordinate with potentially impacted Tribal Nations. And communications have been clear and consistent throughout the planning and permitting phases. Specifically, North Plains Tribal engagement efforts have included:

- North Plains conducted early mapping of Tribal lands and resource to identify potentially impacted Tribal Nations – including Tribal treaty areas and areas of ancestral interest.
- In 2022, as siting and field survey initiated, North Plains established a Tribal Engagement Team (TET) to engage in an ongoing dialogue that would identify and minimize negative impacts of the Project on Tribal resources and increase benefits to our Tribal community.
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- Where significant resources were identified, North Plains provided the opportunity for site visits for the THPO and other Tribal officials.

- North Plains and the Tribe agreed to standard off-sets and buffer zones for all Tribal resources identified by TCSs during survey. And where standard avoidance measures were not feasible or were insufficient for the identified resource(s), the project facilitated meaningful dialogue, listened to our concerns, and incorporated our feedback into Project planning.

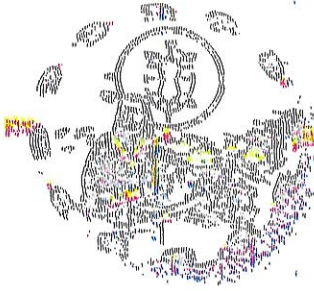
North Plain's early-and-often collaborative approach is a positive example of Tribal engagement. We urge the Commission to approve the Project's siting application and allow the timely advancement of this vital infrastructure project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Courtney Yellow Fat', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Courtney Yellow Fat, THPO
Standing Rock Nation



Larua Jengie
Tribal Historic Preservation Officer

4100 Highway 281 Belcourt, ND 58816
Call: 701.889.9224 Office: 701.477.2040
larua.jengie@tmbci.org

To: North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 E Boulevard Ave, Dept 408
Bismarck, ND 58505-0480

Subject: Letter of Support for the North Plains Connector Transmission Project

Dear Commissioners,

We the TMBCI write to express our support for the North Plains Connector transmission project North Plains Connector being developed by North Plains Connector LLC (North Plains). We commend the Project because it represents a way that developers can both strengthen the region's energy infrastructure and remain thoughtful and respectful of Tribal Nations and Tribal resources.

In its earliest stages, North Plains began to identify and coordinate with potentially impacted Tribal Nations. And communications have been clear and consistent throughout the planning and permitting phases. Specifically, North Plains Tribal engagement efforts have included:

- North Plains conducted early mapping of Tribal lands and resource to identify potentially impacted Tribal Nations – including Tribal treaty areas and areas of ancestral interest.
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North Plain's early-and-often collaborative approach is a positive example of Tribal engagement. We urge the Commission to approve the Project's siting application and allow the timely advancement of this vital infrastructure project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larus Longie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Larus Longie, THPO
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

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Utility Support Letters

400 North Fourth Street
Bismarck, ND 58501
701-222-7900

February 2, 2026

North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 E Boulevard Ave, Dept 408
Bismarck, ND 58505-0480

Subject: Letter of Support for the North Plains Connector Transmission Project

Dear Commissioners:

Montana-Dakota Utilities Co. (MDU) submits this letter in support of North Plains Connector LLC (North Plains) and its application for a Certificate of Corridor Compatibility and Transmission Facility Route Permit for the North Plains Connector Transmission Project (Project). The Project is a timely investment that strengthens North Dakota's grid and increases transfer capacity between North Dakota and its western neighbors. Some benefits include:

- **Benefits to North Dakota customers** – The Project's high voltage direct current (HVDC) technology can modulate flows within seconds, provide voltage and frequency support, and import or export energy as conditions warrant. The Project increases the tools available to MDU to maintain reliable electricity service for communities across North Dakota through:
 - 1) Improved reliability during peak winter and summer load events;
 - 2) Access to geographically diverse resources that can reduce exposure to localized energy shortfalls; and
 - 3) Support stable grid and market operations that help reduce price spikes.
- **Economic and workforce development** – The Project represents a significant private-sector investment in North Dakota infrastructure, including the employment of hundreds of construction workers. North Plains' community investment and workforce initiatives, including collaborations with North Dakota's Bismarck State College and United Tribes Technical College, align with MDU's commitment to support the communities we serve.
- **MDU's potential investment in NPC** – MDU has signed a nonbinding memorandum of understanding (MOU) to purchase 150 MW of capacity from the Project, reinforcing our commitment to securing reliable and low-cost energy resources for our customers.

MDU supports the Project and respectfully requests that the Commission approve North Plains' application. The Project is an important infrastructure investment that will enhance grid reliability, affordability, and resilience for North Dakota customers.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darcy Neigum', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Darcy Neigum
Vice President Energy Supply