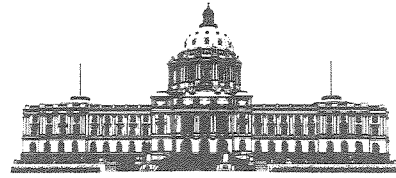


SENATOR SHARON ERICKSON ROPES

Senate District 31 (Fillmore, Houston and Winona Counties)
75 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606
Phone: (651)296-5469
sen.sharon.erickson.ropes@senate.mn



Senate

State of Minnesota

July 23, 2009

Stephanie A. Strength
Environmental Protection Specialist/RD
1400 Independence Ave. SW Room # 2244
Washington, DC 20250-1571
stephanie.strength@usda.gov

Dear Ms. Strength:

I am writing you today to share my perspective on the USDA/RUS EIS for the CapX2020 La Crosse Project and ask that you take my comments into consideration as you go forward with your review process.

I have some concerns from an environmental and rural economic development perspective about the request made by Dairyland for Rural Utilities Services funding of the CapX2020 La Crosse Project. I believe that the United States Department of Agriculture should make an independent and detailed review of claims made by the project proponents in developing the environmental impact statement ("EIS") for the proposed project.

Also, I am concerned that any alternative route for the CapX2020 La Crosse Project could widen existing right of way through the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge, affect migratory birds using the Mississippi Flyway, and negatively affect resources in the Mississippi River corridor. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has expressed concerns regarding impacts on the National Wildlife Refuge in a recent letter to the CapX2020 proponents dated May 9, 2009 and I would encourage you to review this letter as I share many of their concerns.

Furthermore, on behalf of constituents and to protect federal interests in natural resources, I respectfully request that the Rural Utilities Services ("RUS") provide an independent review of whether the CapX2020 La Crosse Project needs have been appropriately defined by project proponents and whether there might be alternatives to meet energy needs that would not impact the Mississippi River corridor bluff lands, scenic roads and National Wildlife Refuge. I believe there is merit in reviewing possible alternatives to the CapX2020 La Crosse Project and would encourage your organization to consider the following potential options in your review:

- Existing, planned and potential local generation in the Rochester and La Crosse areas to meet local reliability needs;
- Existing, newly built, and planned alternative transmission in both Minnesota and Wisconsin that can meet community reliability needs without crossing the Mississippi River and impacting federally protected resources; and
- Conservation, distributed generation and smart grid technology that can address peak energy needs in the Rochester and La Crosse areas and a further examination of the current peak needs of the region.



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COMMITTEES: Vice Chair, Agriculture and Veterans Policy and Budget Division; Higher Education Policy and Budget Division; Health and Human Services Budget Division; Health, Housing, and Family Security

Next, given the potential connection of the La Crosse Project with other CapX2020 projects extending into South Dakota and North Dakota, I would request that the EIS analyze the degree to which the La Crosse Project will permit transmission of coal and lignite coal from the Dakotas, along with associated air emissions and global warming impacts.

Finally, the question of USDA funding of the CapX2020 La Crosse Project raises concerns about the best ways to utilize scarce federal resources and support rural economic development. Although the amount of funding sought is not specifically stated in the Applicant's Alternatives Evaluation Study, if the RUS is being asked to finance Dairyland's 11 percent ownership interest in the La Crosse Project, the federal cost could be up to \$47 million in 2007 dollars.

In considering the "no-build" option, I believe the EIS should also consider the costs and local economic benefits of the La Crosse Project ultra high voltage transmission line in comparison to investments targeted to support community-based renewable energy development. It is possible that other federal infrastructure investments may have greater potential to provide local jobs and multiply benefits throughout rural economies.

I appreciate you taking my comments and concerns regarding the CapX2020 La Crosse Project into consideration as you prepare to conduct the oversight process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon Erickson Ropes".

Sharon Erickson Ropes
State Senator District 31