



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Natural Heritage and ~~500~~ Lafayette Research Program, Box 25
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July 28, 2004

Yvonne Abernethy
Constellation Energy
6120 Woodside Executive Court
Aiken, SC 29803

Re: Request for Natural Heritage information for vicinity of Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant and Transmission Line Corridors, Anoka, Hennepin, Sherburne, and Wright Counties
NHNRP Contract #: ERDB 20040847-0002

Dear Ms. Abernethy,

The Minnesota Natural Heritage database has been reviewed to determine if any rare plant or animal species or other significant natural features are known to occur within the sections indicated on the topographic maps enclosed with your information request. Based on this review, there are 52 known occurrences of rare species or natural communities in the area searched. Please see the enclosed database printouts for details. As the Monticello Nuclear Plant and the identified transmission line corridors are existing facilities, we do not anticipate any impacts to these rare features as a result of the relicensing process alone. However, there are several areas along the transmission line corridors where rare features are known to occur in close proximity to the lines. I have identified these areas below and enclosed maps for your reference. Should any major construction activities or line upgrades be planned for these areas in the future, we request that we be given an opportunity to review and comment on the potential for such activities to impact these rare features.

- A Maple-Basswood Forest is located immediately west of the transmission line in T118N R22W Section 15. This forest type is a remnant of the Big Woods - a large expanse of forest that once stretched across 1.3 million acres of Minnesota. Maple-basswood forests have become rare throughout their former range, particularly within the metropolitan area. Only small isolated patches constituting 2% of the forests' former acreage remain, and many of these are likely to be degraded or destroyed by suburban development within the next few years. A fact sheet on maple-basswood forests of Hennepin County is enclosed for a more thorough discussion of their importance and the threats to their continued existence and viability.
- Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), a threatened species, are known to nest at the NSP plant in Becker in Hennepin County, and Loggerhead Shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus*), a threatened species, have been documented at and in the vicinity of the plant site. Shrikes prefer open country and dry upland prairie with hedgerows, shrubs, and small trees, but are also found around shelterbelts, old orchards, pastures, cemeteries, grassy roadsides, and farmsteads. The scattered trees, shrubs, and fencerows in these areas provide places shrikes need to hunt and nest. Please refer to the enclosed fact sheet for information regarding habitat use, life history, and reasons for the species' decline, as well as recommendations for protecting and enhancing habitat for this rare bird.

DNR Information: 651-296-6157 • 1-888-646-6367 • TTY: 651-296-5484 • 1-800-657-3929

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- The transmission line in T33N R28W Section 14 appears to run along the southern edge of an area that has been identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey as a “Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance”. “Sites of Biodiversity Significance” are areas with varying levels of native biodiversity that may contain high quality native plant communities, rare plants, rare animals, and/or animal aggregations (see the enclosed ranking guidelines for details). This particular site contains Oak Forest, Alder Swamp, Rich Fen, and Dry Oak Savanna native plant communities, and Blanding’s Turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*), a threatened species, have been reported from the site.
- The transmission lines near Bunker Hills Regional Park run through an area that has been identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey as a “Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance”. This site contains Oak Forest and Dry Oak Savanna native plant communities and supports several rare plant species including Tall Nut-Rush (*Scleria triglomerata*), an endangered species, and Sea-Beach Needlegrass (*Aristida tuberculosa*), Purple Sand-Grass (*Triplasis purpurea*), and Rhombic-Petaled Evening Primrose (*Oenothera rhombipetala*), all special concern species. Three special concern animal species, the Leonard Skipper (*Hesperia leonardus*), the Western Hognose Snake (*Heterodon nasicus*), and the Plains Pocket Mouse (*Perognathus flavescens*) have also been documented within the site. In addition, a native prairie remnant has been identified in the right-of-way of the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railroad in this area.
- The transmission line along County Highway 78 in T32N R24W Section 23 runs adjacent to an area that has been identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey as a “Site of High Biodiversity Significance”. This site contains Dry Oak Savanna and Dry Prairie native plant communities and supports two special concern plant species, Sea-Beach Needlegrass (*Aristida tuberculosa*) and Rhombic-Petaled Evening Primrose (*Oenothera rhombipetala*).
- An Oak Forest native plant community is located just south of the transmission line corridor in T33N R26W Sections 22, 26, & 27.
- The transmission line in T33N R26W Section 7 runs just south of an area that has been identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey as a “Site of High Biodiversity Significance”. This site contains Oak Forest, Mixed Hardwood Swamp, Alder Swamp, Tamarack Swamp, and Willow Swamp native plant communities.
- The transmission line in T121N R25W Section 3 runs through a Dry Prairie native plant community that is located along the old railroad grade that has been converted to a bicycle trail.
- Several native plant communities including Floodplain Forest, Bur Oak Woodland, Oak Woodland-Brushland, Willow Swamp, Dry Oak Savanna, and Dry Prairie are located within the Monticello plant property boundary. Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons have also been documented nesting on the property.
- Blanding’s Turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*), a threatened species, have been documented in the vicinity of all of the transmission line corridors, and the lines within T33N R27W Sections 7 & 8 and T33N R26W Sections 8, 16, & 17 are within “known concentration” areas of Blanding’s Turtles. There are 15 such areas in the state. These areas have been determined by the DNR to be locations of highest priority for research and management activities, and are relied upon to maintain the species’ security in the state. For your information, I have attached a fact sheet and a flyer about the Blanding’s Turtle. The fact sheet is intended to provide you with background information regarding habitat use, life history, and reasons for the species’ decline, as well as recommendations for avoiding and minimizing impacts to this rare turtle. As you will note, there are two lists of recommendations. The first list contains recommendations to prevent harm to turtles during construction work, and is relative to all areas inhabited by Blanding’s Turtles. The

second column expands on the first column, and contains greater protective measures to be considered for areas known to be of state-wide importance to Blanding's Turtles (such as the areas mentioned above). The flyer contains an illustration and description of the Blanding's Turtle, as well as a summary of the recommendations provided in the fact sheet.

The Natural Heritage database is maintained by the Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program, a unit within the Division of Ecological Services, Department of Natural Resources. It is continually updated as new information becomes available, and is the most complete source of data on Minnesota's rare or otherwise significant species, natural communities, and other natural features. Its purpose is to foster better understanding and protection of these features.

Because our information is not based on a comprehensive inventory, there may be rare or otherwise significant natural features in the state that are not represented in the database. A county-by-county survey of rare natural features is now underway, and has been completed for Anoka, Hennepin, Sherburne, and Wright Counties. Our information about natural communities is, therefore, quite thorough for that county. However, because survey work for rare plants and animals is less exhaustive, and because there has not been an on-site survey of all areas of the county, ecologically significant features for which we have no records may exist on the project area.

The enclosed results of the database search are provided in two formats: index and full record. To control the release of locational information which might result in the damage or destruction of a rare element, both printout formats are copyrighted.

The index provides rare feature locations only to the nearest section, and may be reprinted, unaltered, in an Environmental Assessment Worksheet, municipal natural resource plan, or report compiled by your company for the project listed above. If you wish to reproduce the index for any other purpose, please contact me to request written permission. The full-record printout includes more detailed locational information, and is for your personal use only. If you wish to reprint the full-record printouts for any purpose, please contact me to request written permission.

Please be aware that review by the Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program focuses only on *rare natural features*. It does not constitute review or approval by the Department of Natural Resources as a whole. If you require further information on the environmental review process for other wildlife-related issues, you may contact your Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologists, Mike North, at (218) 828-2433 or Wayne Barstad, at (651)772-7940.

An invoice for the work completed will be mailed to you under separate cover within two weeks of the date of this letter. You are being billed for map and database search and staff scientist review. Thank you for consulting us on this matter, and for your interest in preserving Minnesota's rare natural resources.

Sincerely,



Sarah D. Hoffmann
Endangered Species Environmental Review Coordinator

encl: Database search results

Rare Feature Database Print-Outs: An Explanation of Fields

Fact sheets: Blanding's Turtles, Loggerhead Shrikes, Maple-Basswood Forests

Natural Communities and Rare Species Maps: Anoka, Hennepin, and Wright Counties

Sites of Biodiversity Significance Ranking Guidelines

cc: Wayne Barstad

Mike North