

*A7. List the full scope of activities planned (only for the location that is the subject of this Environmental Questionnaire)*

**Minnesota Power Response**

The HVDC Terminal Expansion Capability (HTEC) Project (Project) is the upgrade in the new HVDC terminals' capacity from 900 to 1500 MW. This project does not entail any new construction or disruption to existing or new sites. It is limited to the acquisition, installation, and operation of converter transformers, cooling system equipment and foundation upgrades.

Minnesota Power is undertaking a separate, non-federally funded project to modernize and upgrade its existing High-Voltage Direct-Current (HVDC) terminal near the Arrowhead Substation located in Hermantown, Minnesota. That project will upgrade the rating of the new HVDC terminal from 550 MW to 900 MW. For the non-federal project, buildings and electrical infrastructure will be constructed on a new site near the existing Arrowhead HVDC terminal. The non-federally funded Minnesota terminal upgrade is regulated by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. Minnesota Power will be acquiring a Certificate of Need and Route Permit as well as a wetland permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers and Construction Stormwater Permit coverage prior to beginning construction. This work is not part of the project for which Minnesota Power is applying for funding in the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnership (GRIP) FOA-0002740.

*C1. Provide a brief description of the project location*

**Minnesota Power Response**

The Project Study Area is located in St. Louis County, Minnesota within the North Shore Highlands Subsection of the Northern Superior Uplands section of the Laurentian Mixed Forest Province as defined by the MNDNR Ecological Classification System. This subsection is located adjacent to Lake Superior, and parallels the Highland Moraine associated with the lake, 20 to 25 miles inland. Lake Superior is the main feature in this region and moderates the climate throughout the year. Pre-settlement vegetation of this area was pine, fir, and aspen-birch forest, along with conifer bogs and swamps. The present land is still dominated by forest, therefore forest management and recreation, along with tourism are the primary uses (MN DNR 2022aRef 5).

The environmental setting within several miles of the Project Study Area includes forested areas, pockets of open agricultural areas, rural residential development and hydrologic features

including streams, wetlands and small ponds. Many of the streams in this area run directly from the highland to Lake Superior. The terrain is gently rolling to steep (MN DNR 2022aRef 5).

Typical land use within the Project Study Area consists of deciduous forest, with pockets of rural residential development and agricultural lands. The cities of Hermantown and Solway Township are the two residential communities within the Project Study Area. Existing right-of-way associated with two transmission lines, along with township and county roads are present.

*D5a. Describe any historical, archaeological or cultural sites in the vicinity of the proposed project.*

#### **Minnesota Power Response**

No previously recorded archaeological or cultural sites are in the Project area or within one mile of the Project area.

In September 2022, Minnesota Power sponsored a conventional archaeological survey of those portions of the Study Area where landowner permission was available, amounting to 142 acres. Minnesota Power plans to sponsor conventional archaeological survey of any additional parcels that may eventually serve as Project workspace, plus any remaining unsurveyed parcels in 2023. The Applicant will provide any reports to the State Historic Preservation Office and the Office of the State Archaeologist and request comment on report adequacy, resource-specific National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility recommendations, and (if applicable) measures for avoidance, minimization, or mitigation of adverse effects to NRHP-eligible resources.

Based on the September 2022 field investigation, no sites eligible for inclusion on the NRHP would be adversely affected by Project installation, operations, or maintenance (within the 142 acres surveyed). As noted above, the Applicant plans to sponsor conventional archaeological survey of additional parcels as warranted.

*I. Provide a description of how the project would be decommissioned, including the disposition of equipment and materials.*

**Minnesota Power Response**

Minnesota Power would construct the Project to last at least 30 years and has no plans to decommission the Project once it is operational. Due to the strategic location of the Project, Minnesota Power would not decommission to the point of selling the Project location or having it open to the public.

In the unlikely event that Minnesota Power were to decommission the Project, it would remove the equipment and retain possession of the site. Prior to decommissioning, all equipment would be de-energized. All equipment will be removed by Minnesota Power and the fence would remain in place. All pieces of equipment would be tested and confirmed non-hazardous. If determined not to be hazardous, all equipment would be recycled when possible. Equipment required for this would include loaders, bucket trucks, truck and trailers and excavators.