

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 its existing High-Voltage Direct-Current (HVDC) terminal near the Center Substation located in Center, North Dakota. 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 Center HVDC terminal. The non-federally funded North Dakota terminal upgrade is regulated by the North Dakota Public Service Commission. Minnesota Power will be acquiring a Certificate of Corridor Compatibility and Route Permit as well as a 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 Oliver County, North Dakota within the Missouri Plateau – Northwestern Great Plains Ecoregion of North Dakota. Pre-settlement vegetation of this area was primarily native short grass prairie with trees and shrub species growing in seasonal drainage areas. The present land is agriculture use both cultivated crops and animal grazing which are the primary uses.

The environmental setting within several miles of the Project Study Area includes native prairie areas, open agricultural areas, rural residential development and the primary hydrologic feature is Nelson Lake.

The City of Center is the primary residential community near 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 1,152 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 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, five sites in the study area were recommended for avoidance. Project design will incorporate these sites and avoidance is not anticipated to be an issue. As a result, Project installation, operations, or maintenance would not impact any of the five potentially NRHP-eligible sites.

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.