



123 FIFTH STREET SE • CEDAR RAPIDS, IA 52401
TOLL FREE: 887.482.4829 • itc-holdings.com



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 
P.O. BOX 817 • LA CROSSE, IA 54602
608.788.400 • DairylandPower.com

News Release – May 29, 2024

Contact:

ITC Midwest: Rod Pritchard
rpritchard@itctransco.com
319-350-9255

Dairyland Power Cooperative: Katie Thomson
katie.thomson@dairylandpower.com
608-792-5881

Utilities move forward to complete Cardinal-Hickory Creek project Major transmission line will provide multiple benefits for electricity consumers

ITC Midwest and Dairyland Power Cooperative are moving forward to complete the Cardinal-Hickory Creek Transmission Line Project, with a revised projected in-service date of September 27, 2024, barring any future legal injunctions to delay the project. This critical infrastructure project will improve the reliability and flexibility of the region’s transmission system, and support the interconnection of lower-cost, clean, renewable generation across the Upper Midwest.

The land exchange between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), ITC Midwest and Dairyland Power Cooperative was completed on May 9. This enables ITC Midwest to finish 1.1 miles of the project located near the Mississippi River in Iowa as well as the span across the Mississippi River to Wisconsin.

With ownership of this ground complete, ITC Midwest began construction on the acquired land on May 13. This work is subject to terms and conditions set forth by the USFWS and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and initially involved surveying and staking followed by vegetation clearing and matting. Construction outside of this area will also continue, as needed, to support energization of the line.

As the USFWS confirmed after careful review before approving it, the land exchange will provide significant net benefits to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge) when the project is completed. To complement the benefits of the land exchange, the construction plan includes the removal of the current transmission lines and structures through the Refuge and across the Mississippi River. The net impact of these shifts in infrastructure will reduce the electric transmission footprint in the Refuge and replace existing structures with low-profile structures using an avian-friendly design.

“Cardinal-Hickory Creek is a prime example of local opposition using the court system to block critical energy infrastructure, which only serves to delay significant economic

benefits for electricity consumers. This backbone project for the Midwest's regional power grid will enhance resource adequacy at a critical time, improve grid reliability, and deliver lower-cost energy to market," said ITC Midwest President Dusky Terry. "The federal agencies that granted the land exchange and issued permits for the project acted within their legal authority under federal law and their environmental review complied with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The time is now to finish this transmission project for the benefit of the greater grid."

"Project planning remains focused on safety and our shared commitment to minimizing environmental impacts during construction and maximizing environmental benefits once in-service," said Ben Porath, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for Dairyland Power Cooperative. "The project will provide significant net benefits for the Refuge, by adding highly desirable land to the Refuge and reducing the transmission infrastructure."

Over the past decade, the Cardinal-Hickory Creek project – including the need for the project and its route – has been reviewed and approved by multiple state and federal agencies. The project has also been the subject of multiple state and federal lawsuits and was ultimately on the prevailing side in prior litigation. As the utilities have noted previously, additional delays in completion greatly increase the cost burdens and delay the environmental benefits of this project.

Although the legal proceedings continue, over the past few years, several of the same opponents that are currently challenging the USFWS land exchange have filed multiple lawsuits in federal and state courts trying to stop construction of the project. The co-owner utilities have successfully navigated numerous injunctions, won appeals before the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and received several favorable opinions from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

Cardinal-Hickory Creek project progress and benefits

Construction of the 102-mile, 345,000-volt (345-kV) Cardinal-Hickory Creek Transmission Line Project is nearly complete, with the eastern half of the line placed in service in December 2023. As of October 2023, there were 161 renewable generation projects in Wisconsin, Iowa and other Upper Midwestern states representing more than 24.7 gigawatts conditioned upon its completion – enough to power millions of homes and businesses with clean energy.

The USFWS-approved land exchange involving two of the co-owner utilities – ITC Midwest and Dairyland Power Cooperative – was the last major step to facilitate completion of the project. The land exchange provides important net benefits to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Refuge), including the reduction of the total transmission footprint. These benefits are described in detail by the USFWS in the [Land Exchange Net Benefit Analysis](#), which found that "the proposed land exchange fulfills the Refuge's purposes by exchanging lower quality habitat for higher quality habitat, increasing the total protected acreage in the Refuge, reducing habitat fragmentation in the long term, and allowing the Refuge to acquire a high-priority tract that would not otherwise be available. Each of these factors will further the

purposes of conserving and maintaining refuge and breeding places for birds, animals, fish and plants. Acquisition of the Wagner tract provides value for wildlife-dependent recreation on the Refuge, such as hunting, fishing and wildlife observation, which is directly related to the purposes of this Refuge and of the National Wildlife Refuge System as a whole.”

ITC Midwest and Dairyland Power Cooperative are committed to constructing the project in a manner that minimizes environmental impacts by using mitigation measures and best management practices. All work within the boundaries of the Refuge for construction of the project will be completed using wooden construction mats for environmental protection. No grading will take place within the Refuge. These efforts will avoid and minimize impacts to plants, animals and their habitats, and limit habitat fragmentation. These commitments include a robust set of mitigation and restoration methods resulting from years of agency consultation through the permitting process.

The Cardinal-Hickory Creek Transmission Line Project was approved in 2011 as part of a set of Multi-Value Projects (MVPs) by the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, the independent, not-for-profit regional transmission grid planning agency and transmission system operator that oversees the regional electric transmission grid in portions of the Upper Midwest. The co-owner utilities developing the project are ATC, ITC Midwest and Dairyland Power Cooperative.

For detailed information, see the Cardinal-Hickory Creek Transmission Line Project [website](#).