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May 17, 2024

VIA Electronic Filing

Ms. Debbie-Anne Reese, Acting Secretary Federal Energy Regulatory Commission 888 First Street, NE Washington, DC 20426

Subject: Additional Information Request

White River Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 2444-042)

Dear Acting Secretary Reese:

On April 3, 2024, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission) issued an Additional Information Request letter to Northern States Power Company, a Wisconsin corporation (NSPW), regarding its final license application for the White River Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2444). Accordingly, NSPW hereby submits the following information and responses as requested in the Commission's aforementioned letter.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION Commission Comment 1

Item 13 of Schedule B of staff's September 19, 2023 letter, requested the "RAW Field Data including Field Notes" referenced in the Quality Monitoring Study filed in Appendix E-10 of Exhibit E of the license application. Northern States' December 14, 2023 filing, only includes the field notes; it does not include the temperature or dissolved oxygen (DO) data from the 2022 Water Quality Monitoring Study. Please file the temperature and DO data that Northern States collected from May through October, 2022, in tabular format.

NSPW Response

Appendix AIR-1, filed as a separate document, includes the tabular temperature and DO data.

Commission Comment 2

Item 16 of Schedule B of staff's September 19, 2023 letter, requested information on current and proposed vegetation management at the project. Northern States' December 14, 2023 filing, indicates that Northern States manages and maintains vegetation on the earthen embankments and other project areas but does not clearly describe whether current or proposed vegetation management practices at the project include the application of herbicides. If herbicide is used, please describe the current and proposed application practices, including the locations and/or project facilities where it is applied.

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NSPW Response

NSPW utilizes a certified herbicide application contractor (currently 4 Control) to complete herbicide applications at the Project. Annual herbicide applications are limited to the following five areas:

- Access road leading from the boat landing to the intake structure along the west side of Highway 112,
- Stairway along the south side of the spillway,
- Rip rap at the retaining wall on the north side of the spillway,
- Chain link fence leading from the substation to the surge tank, and
- Intersection of the plant access road with Highway 112 to maintain an unobstructed view corridor for vehicles entering and leaving the site.

Appendix AIR-2, filed as a separate document, includes a map of the herbicide application areas listed above, as well as a list of herbicides that may be used and their associated application rates, labels (link provided), and safety data sheets (link provided).

Commission Comment 3

In the revised Exhibit A of the license application filed on February 27, 2024, Northern States describes project operation, including automatic operation of the project's gated spillway to release water and maintain run-of-river operation during high flow/rain events. Please describe any current or proposed procedures for monitoring rain events upstream of the project.

NSPW Response

NSPW currently monitors daily forecasts for the project vicinity as issued by the National Weather Service (NWS) office in Duluth, MN. We also access the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Prediction Center's website on a daily basis to review predicted precipitation (quantitative precipitation forecast or QPF) over various time intervals (e.g., 24 hours, 3 days, 7 days, etc.). Finally, we track real-time precipitation during rain events to evaluate how much precipitation has occurred in the watershed upstream of the White River Dam. No changes to the aforementioned procedures are being proposed.

Commission Comment 4

On December 12, 2023, the National Park Service filed comments stating that the project could potentially affect segments of the White River and Bad River that are included in the National Rivers Inventory (NRI), and potentially affect the Kakagon Sloughs that are designated as a National Natural Landmark (NNL). Also, on December 14, 2023, the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians filed comments stating that the project operation has adversely affected Tribal fishing downstream of the project. Please provide a record of deviations (planned, unplanned, and temporary amendments) from run-of-river operation in the last 10 years that resulted in a visible environmental effect, including: (1) the reasons for the deviation and how project operation was modified; (2) the duration and magnitude of the deviation; (3) operational data in tabular format, including at least hourly inflow, outflow, and impoundment elevations during the deviation; (4) documentation of any observed or reported environmental effects, including but not limited to effects on fish, aquatic habitat, or wild rice beds in the White River, Bad River or Kakagon Sloughs; (5) a description of measures implemented to prevent similar deviations in the future; and (6) any proposed relicensing measures that would prevent similar deviations during the term of any new license, including capital and annual costs for each measure (e.g., each measure that would be included in the proposed compliance monitoring plan, and itemized capital and annual costs for each measure (e.g., each measure that would be included in the proposed compliance monitoring plan, and itemized capital and annual costs for each measure).

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NSPW Response

Licensee reviewed its operational records from January 1, 2014 through December 31, 2023. None of the deviations from normal operations reported any adverse environmental effects. Below is a summary of deviations from normal operations during that timeframe.

- May 17, 2016- Report of pond level deviations and request for temporary license amendment(<u>FERC Accession No. 20160517-5182</u>). No adverse environmental impacts were reported. Temporary amendment granted on August 1, 2016.
- June 8, 2016 Report of pond level deviations for the period from January 2009 to May 25, 2016 (FERC Accession No. 20160608-5008). No adverse environmental impacts were reported. The vast majority of the pond level deviations were the result of intentional overtopping of the spillway gates which more closely mimicked a run-of-river operation versus maintaining the pond elevation within the required operating range via the large tainter gate. Operating the large gate to maintain the pond elevation results in significant water level fluctuations downstream.
- July 3, 2018 Report of pond level deviations from June 15 to June 23, 2018 due to extreme flood event (FERC Accession No. 20180703-5127). No adverse environmental impacts were reported.
- March 8, 2019 Deviation from run-of-river operations (FERC Accession No. 20190308-5279). DNR claimed adverse impacts in response but did not provide any evidence. FERC response on May 2, 2019 concluded the incident was not a violation and there were no reported adverse impacts.
- June 6, 2019 Report of pond level deviations for the period of April 22-23 and May 18-19, 2019 (FERC Accession No. 20190606-5039). No adverse environmental impacts were reported.
- January 22, 2020 Report of pond level deviations for the period of December 28-29, 2019 (FERC Accession No. 20200123-5010). No adverse environmental impacts were reported.
- April 22, 2021 Report of pond level deviations from March 6-31, 2021 (FERC Accession No. 20210422-5117). No adverse environmental impacts were reported.
- April 30, 2021 Report of pond level deviation that occurred on April 22, 2021 (FERC Accession No. 20210430-5251). No adverse environmental impacts were reported.
- March 9, 2022 Request for temporary amendment of license article 401 to allow for reservoir drawdown (FERC Accession No. 20220309-5172). FERC approved licensee's amendment request via their August 15, 2022 Order Modifying and Granting Temporary Amendment of Reservoir Elevation Requirement. Environmental monitoring was completed during the drawdown. Results of the monitoring were included in the Drawdown Monitoring Report filed on November 9, 2022 (FERC Accession No. 20221109-5140).

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> March 29, 2022 – Report of pond level deviation that occurred on March 8, 2022. (FERC Accession No. 20220329-5221). No adverse environmental impacts were reported.

Commission Comment 5

Please provide maps of the wild rice wetlands downstream of the project and the 2,850-acre Kakagon Sloughs NNL, including the precise locations and boundaries.

NSPW Response

NSPW utilized the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) Surface Water Data Viewer website to review mapped "wild rice waters" within and downstream of the White River Project. Maps generated using this data viewer show wild rice within the project reservoir and within the Kakagon Sloughs wetland complex. No wild rice waters were identified within the White River downstream of the project or within the Bad River. Within the Kakagon Sloughs wetland complex, WDNR identified wild rice waters within the Kakagon Slough, Wood Creek Slough, Beartrap Creek, Kakagon River, Sandcut Slough, Bad River Slough, and Honest John Lake.

NSPW also utilized the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (<u>GLIFWC</u>) <u>website</u> to generate maps showing wild rice (manoomin) polygons identified by the site's web mapper. Wild rice was mapped in two locations: within the White River reservoir and within Wood Creek Slough.

Appendix AIR-3, filed as a separate document, includes maps of the WDNR wild rice waters and the GLIFWC manoomin polygons.

Should you wish to access the information provided in this submittal, it is posted at the following website: https://hydrorelicensing.com/whiteriver/. Should you have any questions, please contact Matthew Miller at 715-737-1353 or matthew.j.miller@xcelenergy.com.

Sincerely,

Don Hartinger Plant Director, Renewable Operations-Hydro

Enclosure

CC: Stakeholder List

¹ It should be noted that the Kakagon Sloughs wetland complex is fed by several streams. While the Bad River feeds the overall wetland complex, it is hydraulicly separate from the majority of the mapped wild rice waters.

Appendix AIR-1 Tabular Temperature and Dissolved Oxygen Data

This information has been submitted as a separate file.

Appendix AIR-2 Herbicide Application Locations and Herbicide Information

This information has been submitted as a separate file.

Appendix AIR-3 WDNR Wild Rice Waters and GLIFWC Manoomin Polygons

This information has been submitted as a separate file.

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that I, on behalf of Northern States Power Company, a Wisconsin corporation, have served by US mail or via email (if a mailing address was not available), the foregoing documents in electronic format upon each person designated on the attached distribution list.

Dated this 17th day of May 2024

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Mead & Hunt, Inc.

Davin Johnson

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