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County board discusses transmission line

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Koochiching County Board Tuesday heard from Jim Atkinson, Minnesota Power environmental siting and permitting manager, about the current route alternatives for the Great Northern Transmission Line.

Minnesota Power has been holding open houses, meetings, and compiling data, he said, but has yet to start the permitting application process. He said they expect to submit the application in February or early March.

“For over a year now, what we’ve been doing is our stakeholder and public outreach, to try to learn as much as we can about the potential routes that we identified and make adjustments accordingly,” he said.

The company voluntarily hosted four rounds of open houses in the past year, he said, with one open house in Littlefork each time, as it’s closest to the routes they’re considering. The last such

open house was Nov. 16 in Littlefork. The project has now reached the route selection phase, he said.

“We’re going to get rid of the ones we don’t think we want, and forward a preferred route alternative and one other alternative to the state,” he said.

Through this process, Minnesota Power introduced a couple alternative route segments based on input from public open houses, he said. The original proposed route would run up to 1.5 miles from Littlefork. The alternative segment, however, is 8.5 miles from Littlefork, and also eliminates pinch points from the original proposed route. The alternative segment also follows mostly on public land, he said, and cuts down the total length of the line by about 12 miles. At a cost of \$2-3 million per mile, this would also save on costs, he said.

At such a high cost, Atkinson said the company would love to build the route in a straight line, but factors like wetlands, Scientific and Natural Areas, and state

parks make that impossible.

“Trust me, if we could, we would,” he said.

The lack of naming for these routes makes it frustrating to discuss all the alternative routes available, Commissioner Wayne Skoe said.

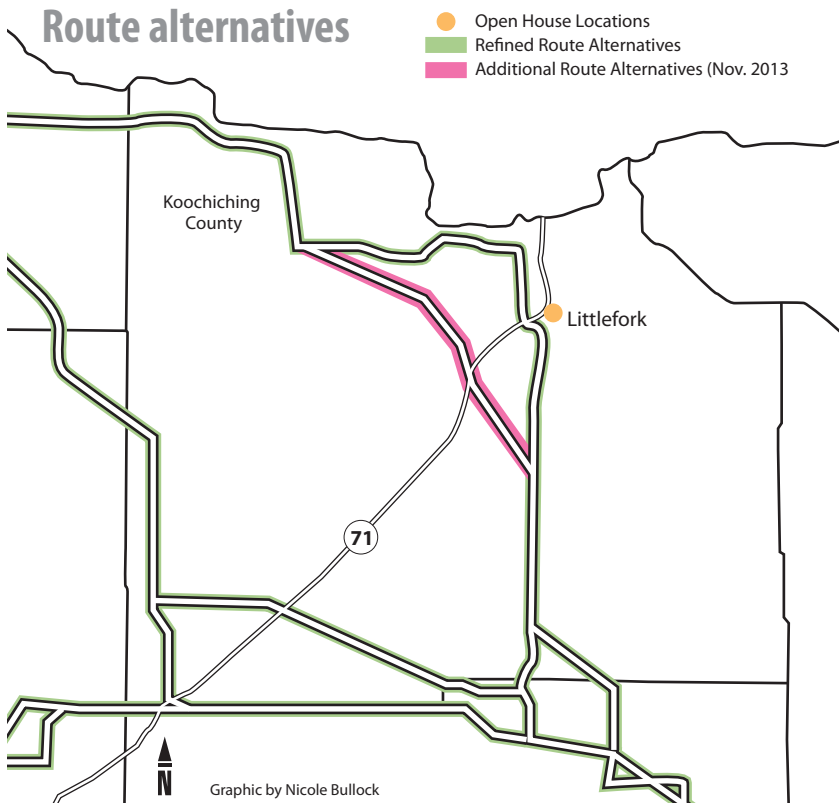
“At the second meeting we had in Northome for the alternative route, they asked people to suggest the one they wanted,” Skoe said. “What do you call it?”

Atkinson recognized the lack of names for the options was a limitation, and made it difficult to discuss different ones at once.

“That’s a very legitimate complaint,” Atkinson said.

The new transmission line benefits Minnesota Power customers by providing a more stable energy system, Atkinson said. About 75 percent of the electricity is now created by burning coal, he said. Completing the project would allow the company to reduce its reliance on coal to one-third,

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This map shows the proposed route alternatives for the Great North Transmission Line.



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Using pieces of candy, Voyageurs National Park biologist Steve Windels, center, teaches third-graders the importance of legal versus illegal hunting of wolves and other animals.



Using a transmitter, Steve Windels attempts to locate a radio collar hidden in Lisa West’s third-grade classroom. Windels told students the noise of the transmitter grows louder when closer to the collar. He said collars are used to track wolves and other animals to allow scientists to study them.

Wolf education

Voyageurs National Park biologist Steve Windels Wednesday visited Lisa West’s third-grade class at Falls Elementary to teach students about wolves. Windels educated the children on why he and others study wolves and demonstrated different exercises on why the animal is important.



Students listen to Steve Windels’ presentation on proper wolf management.

Water study proposal could be joint effort

EDA director reports on a variety of items

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

With International Falls’ water recognized as among the best tasting in the state and nation, city officials have wondered if its water could be turned into gold.

A proposal to conduct a water study to help the city determine the feasibility of using the city’s water for a viable businesses development will take more time, the International Falls Economic Development Authority Commission heard from its director Monday.

Shawn Mason, EDA director, told the commission, which is made up of city councilors, that APEX, a business development engine for northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin, and

an independent economic development specialist have asked for more time in submitting a proposal to do the study.

Mason said both companies have been asked to provide proposals and have met with one another to explore establishing a partnership in their proposal to the city.

She told the commission she would keep it abreast of the proposal.

International Falls lost first place in a tie breaker with Duluth for the “Best in Glass” at the Minnesota chapter of the



Shawn Mason

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School recognizes innovation, creativity

TXT4Life program, which includes Koochiching County, recognized

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

A unique suicide crisis texting program for teens and young adults in northeastern Minnesota was chosen as the top award in the county category for the 2013 Local Government Innovation Awards organized by the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

The program “TXT4Life” covers seven counties, including Koochiching, and four tribal nations — a geographic area that represents six percent of the state’s population but consistently reports higher-than-average suicide rates.

The award, presented Nov. 14, is in partnership with the Bush Foundation and co-sponsored by the League of Minnesota Cities, the Association of Minnesota Counties, and the Minnesota School Board Association, and recognizes government entities for their creativity and effectiveness in redesigning how they do business.

A panel of judges considered 94 submissions for creativity, sustainability, and collaboration. The overall category winners will each receive a \$10,000 grant from the Bush Foundation to continue

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