

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–2308

February 10, 2023

The Honorable Andrew Berke
Administrator
Rural Utilities Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Administrator Berke:

We write today urging you to reissue the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Nemadji Trail Energy Center (NTEC) located in Superior, Wisconsin. NTEC would provide dispatchable natural gas-generated baseload power desperately needed throughout the vast service territories of Dairyland Power Cooperative, Minnesota Power, and Basin Electric Power Cooperative. The proposal is supported by local building trade unions, including the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) who specialize in building energy generation and distribution.¹ Years of public comment have resulted in a strong, defensible Environmental Assessment (EA). It's high time to provide our communities with the reliable power they deserve by issuing a FONSI for NTEC.

Initial scoping of the NTEC project commenced in 2017, resulting in the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) issuing a FONSI in June of 2021. After receiving a petition from an anti-energy activist legal organization based in the Twin Cities the following July, RUS and project sponsors consented to a supplemental EA. Originally scheduled to be operating in 2025, the commercial operation date has been pushed back to 2027 due to the extended analysis. With significant, documented communication between your agency, project sponsors, and outside stakeholders, a year and a half has passed. Eighteen months to simply update an EA and reissue a FONSI for a project is unacceptable, let alone five and a half years of total project development.

We need reliable baseload power across the Upper Midwest. By not issuing this FONSI, RUS is denying ratepayers access to power and the peace of mind of knowing they can turn the heat up when temperatures plummet well below zero. The Midcontinent Independent Systems Operator (MISO) makes clear in its comment on the project that additional, dispatchable baseload generation like NTEC are needed, even with increased solar and wind energy on the grid:

“As RUS considers the need for electrical power in its decisions, MISO fully supports not only the resource development of new energy projects, but the orderly transition of existing resources to ensure short- and long-term grid reliability and prevent future resource inadequacies in the MISO region.”²

¹ International Union of Operating Engineers President Michael Callahan to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack, November 23, 2022.

² MISO Deputy General Counsel – Regulatory Kristina Tridico to RUS Environmental Protection Specialist Peter Steinour, July 25, 2022.

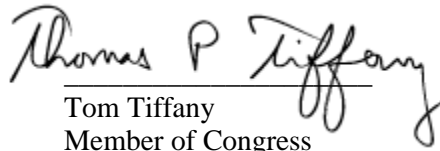
NTEC enjoys robust community support, including from building trades unions. The project will boost local budgets with tax revenues for schools, police, fire, public safety, and more. Along with providing high-wage, union protected jobs to local building trade unions, NTEC will provide a strong influx of economic activity for a region that desperately needs it. Meanwhile, the service territories NTEC will supply feature a significant, industrial base that desperately needs reliable power. Our mining, forestry, and manufacturing sectors are desperate for reliable, affordable power.

MISO argues that we need reliable baseload power to supplement a growing wind and solar fleet. The building trades support the high-quality, family-supporting wages NTEC will provide. Instead of listening to radical environmental groups, I urge you to listen to MISO, the building trades, and our communities and reissue the FONSI for NTEC.

Sincerely,



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



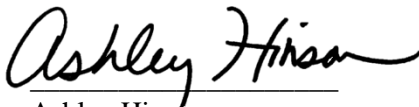
Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress



Brad Finstad
Member of Congress



Michelle Fischbach
Member of Congress



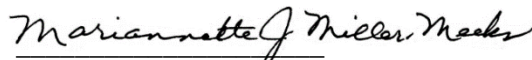
Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress




Kelly Armstrong
Member of Congress




Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress



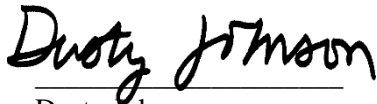
Mariannette Miller-Meeks
Member of Congress



Zach Nunn
Member of Congress



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress



Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress



Derrick Van Orden
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture