

Notice of Determination

This notice of determination is being issued by Parks Canada under the *Impact Assessment Act* for the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro (NL Hydro) Transmission Lines Modification Project Detailed Impact Assessment (DIA). Parks Canada has determined that the proposed project is not likely to cause significant adverse effects. Mitigation measures will be implemented for the following medium- and high-risk valued components: vegetation communities and species, viewscales, and UNESCO World Heritage Site - Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for scenic beauty. Additional mitigation measures will be implemented for low-risk natural resources, and visitor experience and safety valued components.

Proposed Project

NL Hydro is proposing to widen the Right of Way (ROW) corridors for five transmission lines that run through Gros Morne National Park. These lines are critical infrastructure, delivering electricity to national park facilities, enclave communities, and destinations north of the national park (i.e., over 9,000 customers). The transmission lines currently have higher service disruption rates than lines outside the park. The service disruptions are the result of ROWs within the park being 40-50% narrower compared to outside the park, which increases the likelihood of trees contacting the lines. Narrower ROWs also make repairs more difficult and dangerous and increase the risk of wildfires.

The proposed five-year (2024-2028) project will increase the five ROW widths from 9-15m to 19-29m within the park, depending on the terrain. A two-zone approach is proposed where the “wire zones” continue to be cleared of all trees and shrubs while selective removal of trees tall enough to reach the wire security area will occur in the “border zones”. All vegetation removal will be performed using manual methods (i.e., chainsaws, brush saws, pruning saws rather than heavy equipment). Crews will access sites by ATV and/or on foot via existing access trails. Utilizable wood will be cut, piled, and stacked for use by participants in Parks Canada’s domestic timber harvest program (once work in the area is complete). The total area of trees to be cleared during this project is estimated to be 33 hectares, distributed along the approximately 80km of transmission lines. The total transmission line area within Gros Morne National Park will increase from approximately 157 to 190 hectares.

Indigenous Consultation and Engagement

Parks Canada initiated discussions about the project with the Miawpukek and Qalipu First Nations in November 2023. In April 2024, both First Nations were provided the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the proposed project. In May 2024, the draft DIA report was also provided for their review and comment.

Public Engagement

Parks Canada and NL Hydro engaged with community members, approximately 100 identified stakeholders, and local governments, regarding the proposed project. Parks Canada and NL Hydro also met with municipal councils of enclave communities in February 2024, including the Town of Woody Point, Town of Trout River, Town of Glenburnie-Birchy Head-Shoal Brook, Town of Norris Point, Town of Rocky Harbour, Town of St. Paul’s, and Town of Cow Head.

Summary of Analysis

The DIA examined the risks and benefits of the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro Transmission Lines Modification Project. The DIA considered “No Action” and “Status Quo” alternatives to the project, but ultimately it was determined that there is no viable alternative to the proposed ROW widening which will effectively mitigate the current service reliability issues and safety risks.

High or Medium-Risk Valued Components

Vegetation Communities and Species

Widening and future maintenance of the ROWs may negatively impact the vegetation communities (forests and wetlands) that the hydro lines pass through, as well as Endangered Vreeland’s Striped Coralroot, Threatened Black Ash, and locally significant Yellow Birch, White Pine, and Red Maple.

No vegetation clearing will occur in wetlands within the project area. Impacts to significant plant species will be mitigated through crew education/awareness, retaining trees wherever possible, and the use of manual and careful tree cutting practices. Management zones will also be established around individual Vreeland’s Striped Coralroot and Black Ash, where all vegetation is retained, and project activities are limited. Clean equipment protocols will be implemented, and ground disturbances will be minimized to limit the potential introduction or spread of invasive plant species to the project area.

Although the ROW widening will result in the permanent removal of approximately 33 hectares of forest, the impacts have been minimized to the greatest extent possible, using the two-zone approach. Impacts are also localized to the edges of the existing ROW and the scale of impacts constitutes a very small percentage of the overall park area. The desired outcome, to conserve healthy vegetation communities that maintain a native and biodiverse species composition, will be achieved.

Viewscapes

Vegetation removal may affect viewscapes within the park, which could negatively impact visitor experience. Parks Canada determined that 10 key viewscapes and areas within the park could be affected by the widening of the ROW for the project (2023).

The DIA provides mitigation measures for minimizing impacts to viewscapes. In addition to the implementation of the two-zone approach, which will retain shrubs and understory vegetation where possible, mitigations will include crew education/awareness and exploring tree planting as an option to enhance viewscape buffers. NL Hydro and Parks Canada will also collaborate closely to develop site-specific prescriptions for the 10 viewscapes and areas identified in the DIA.

Impacts to the viewscapes will be semi-permanent, extending for the duration of the hydro corridor maintenance program. Impacts will be localized and, with the implementation of mitigation measures, including the two-zone approach and the development of site-specific plans and detailed prescriptions, they have been minimized to the greatest extent possible. The desired outcome, to minimize the creation of new, and expansion of existing, undesirable visual impacts while supporting the safety and reliability of power delivery infrastructure, will be achieved.

UNESCO Outstanding Universal Value

The widening of the ROW corridors for five transmission lines may change viewscales within the park and has the potential to affect the Park's UNESCO OUV for exceptional natural beauty (Criterion vii).

Given that the project will be widening existing ROW corridors within the park, the implementation of the two-zone approach, as well as the mitigations, site-specific plans and detailed prescriptions for viewscales, the potential impacts from the project are expected to be localized and minimized to the greatest extent possible.

The Desired Outcome, for the maintenance of the OUV of the Park in relation to its scenic beauty (Criterion vii) and for the park to continue to be a "wilderness environment including landlocked, freshwater fjord and glacier-scoured headlands in an ocean setting and evidence of human intervention does not distract from the natural beauty" is expected to be achieved.

Low Risk Valued Components

Parks Canada identified the following low-risk natural resource and visitor experience VCs that the Project may interact with habitat connectivity, aquatic habitats/water quality, migratory birds, Threatened Red Crossbill, Threatened American Marten, Special Concern Woodland Caribou, Species at Risk bats, Moose, Soils, and Visitor Experience – Access and Safety. Impacts to these VC's are expected to be negligible to low given the scope and scale of the proposed project and following the implementation of the two-zone approach and other standard mitigation measures (e.g. timing windows). Significant adverse effects for low-risk VCs are not expected.

Monitoring

NL Hydro personnel will direct and monitor Project activities full-time. NL Hydro will continue to work collaboratively with Parks Canada throughout the Project execution phase and incorporate lessons learned and opportunities for improvement. Joint annual project reviews are recommended in addition to routine collaboration throughout the life of the Project.

The widened areas, or "border zones", where shrubs and small trees will be retained, will be monitored and scheduled for selective cutting or trimming once trees approach a height where they become an encroachment concern.

Conclusion

Taking into account the results of the DIA analysis and implementation of mitigation measures outlined in the assessment, Parks Canada has determined that the proposed NL Hydro Transmission Lines Modification Project is not likely to cause significant adverse effects.

To request a copy of the final Detailed Impact Assessment report, contact:

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