

MANAGING MONTICELLO TRUMPETER SWANS AND POWER LINE ISSUES – A COOPERATIVE EFFORT

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ABSTRACT

In the winter of 1986/1987, the first adult and cygnet Trumpeter Swans showed up at the home of Sheila Lawrence on the shore of the Mississippi River in Monticello, Wright County, Minnesota. These swans were banded by Hennepin Parks (now Three Rivers Park District). During the next winter, 15 trumpeters wintered at this location on the Mississippi River. The number of wintering swans continued to grow and by the winter of 1996/1997, Sheila Lawrence counted 200 swans wintering at Monticello. In the winter of 2004/2005, there were an estimated 1,100 swans wintering on the river between Monticello and Elk River, Minnesota (Sheila Lawrence, pers. comm.). The swans usually arrive at Monticello around late December, once the area lakes have frozen over. Xcel Energy facilities include the Sherburne County Generating Plant and the Monticello Nuclear Power Generating Plant which create a warm water discharge that provides ~10 miles of ice-free water between Monticello and Elk River, Minnesota.

There are multiple 69 kV and 345 kV electric transmission lines (Figure 1) in the vicinity of the Trumpeter Swan wintering area at Monticello. In 2002, Xcel Energy met with The Trumpeter Swan Society, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Three Rivers Park District, and Monticello residents to address the issue of the swan collisions with the 69kV transmission lines that run across the Mississippi River in Monticello, a location where a number of swans have had fatal collisions or injuries. Other swan collisions with power lines have occurred in Rogers, Hennepin County, Minnesota, and in other growing suburbs of the western edge of the Twin Cities where Trumpeter Swans now regularly nest (Figure 2). Collisions have also been documented with lines that run along lakes and potato fields where the swans fly in to feed and do not see the wires. Bird flappers have been used by local cooperatives and Xcel Energy to prevent collisions with distribution lines (Figure 3). All collisions of swans with power lines will not be eliminated. We must balance the costs with any impact to the population success. Xcel Energy will continue to work with community, agencies, and interest groups such as The Trumpeter Swan Society, Minnesota DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Three Rivers Park District, and Monticello residents. Xcel Energy will continue to monitor collision incidents, support restoration, and management efforts. Xcel Energy has a Memorandum of Understanding with the USFWS to report all known swan power line collisions and is currently working with a consultant to develop an Avian Protection Plan for both Northern States Power Company-Minnesota and Northern States Power Company-Wisconsin operating companies.



Figure 1. Multiple electric transmission lines in proximity to Monticello, Minnesota.



Figure 2. Swan power line collision at western edge of the Twin Cities, Minnesota.



Figure 3. Local energy cooperatives and Xcel Energy install bird flappers on power lines.