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**INTRODUCTION**

GridAmerica Holdings, LLC, in partnership with Citizens Energy, is proposing the Granite State Power Link project (“GSPL” or “Project”) for the purpose of bringing clean, affordable, reliable renewable energy into the New England grid.

The proposed facilities will bring 1,200 megawatts of power into the system helping relieve pressures from retired/retiring fossil fuel and nuclear plants and the increasing demand for clean, affordable power. In order to bring this power into the system, GSPL will bring available Canadian wind and hydro via a new high-voltage direct current line from the Canadian border into northern New Hampshire, linking into an upgraded AC system already in place in NH. The project requires two new converter stations (one in northern Vermont and one in Monroe, NH), approximately 58 miles of new HVDC line, nearly 109 miles of upgraded existing alternating current line (AC) in New Hampshire, and a new switching station in Londonderry, NH.

GridAmerica will file applications with the U.S. Department of Energy for a Presidential Permit, the Vermont Public Service Board, and the New Hampshire Site Evaluation Committee for project approvals. Federal and state authorities will conduct a full review under its regulations. Prior to filing applications and in accordance with GridAmerica’s development philosophy, the GSPL project team will conduct extensive outreach and collaboration with landowners/abutters, stakeholders and government agencies.

GridAmerica is committed to working with landowners, abutters and other stakeholders in an ongoing effort to better understand and address the interests and concerns of these groups regarding the GSPL. The company's goal is to develop a project that provides benefits to Massachusetts ratepayers and to the host communities. GridAmerica will work with all landowners, local communities, and governing bodies to ensure that they are aware of the Project and updated as it progresses. It is GridAmerica’s policy to work via the appropriate agencies to ensure that the facilities are developed and operated to meet or exceed all safety, environmental, regulatory and legal requirements. For these reasons, GridAmerica has developed this *Stakeholder Involvement and Public Outreach Plan (Plan)*.

GridAmerica takes pride in its long-standing commitment of working with landowners and other stakeholders and seeking input from them. Throughout the process and following completion, GridAmerica remains dedicated to working with the communities on their needs and interests as the facilities are maintained and operated into the future.

This *Plan* was developed in accordance with industry best practices for stakeholder involvement in large-scale infrastructure projects.

**THE PROJECT**

GridAmerica LLC is proposing to construct, install, own, operate, and maintain the Granite State Power Link. The project includes includes two converter stations, 59 miles of direct current (HVDC) line, 109 miles of alternating current (AC) line and one switching station. The project will be built on or adjacent to existing transmission rights-of-way/corridors to maximize benefits and minimize local and environmental impacts and development costs. The proposed facilities will safely and efficiently transport 1,200 megawatts of power into the New England power grid.

## Proposed Project Facilities

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| **Vermont (12 towns)** | **New Hampshire (24 towns)** |
| Converter station (approx. 12 acres) | Converter station in Monroe, NH on company property (approx. 12 acres) |
| 53 miles of HVDC line through Northeast Kingdom | 6 miles of HVDC line in northern NH with corridor increase ranging from 75’ to 150’ |
| 150’ corridor increase | 109 miles of AC line from Monroe to Londonderry |
|  | Switching station in Londonderry, NH |
|  | For the AC upgrade, 80 percent of the existing structure configurations will remain and approx. 20 percent will be replaced with slightly taller structures (no more than 80’ high, currently 60’) |
|  | Approx. 1 mile ROW expansion in Monroe for AC line |
|  | Approx. 2 miles of the ROW in the southern portion of the AC line will require expansion of no more than 80’ |

## Proposed Project Schedule

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| --- | --- |
| MILESTONE | TIMING |
| Begin pre-permit outreach process | March 2017 |
| Submit MA Clean Energy RFP Submission | July 27, 2017 |
| File DOE Presidential Permit | Fall 2017 |
| Receive Decision on RFP | January 2018 |
| File VT and NH State Applications | March 2018 |
| Receive Decision on State Applications | Spring 2019 |
| Receive all permits | Mid-2020 |
| Begin Construction | Mid-2020 |
| Project In-Service | End of Year 2022 |

**OUTREACH & PUBLIC PARTCIPATION**

Stakeholder engagement is a vital part of GridAmerica activities. Executing a project of this scale and scope requires close, regular and clear communication with many levels of stakeholders. In an effort to maintain two-way communication with all interested and affected stakeholders, GridAmerica has developed this *Plan*.

## Purpose

The purpose of this *Plan* is to:

* Provide general information about the processes involved in electric transmission projects.
* Define the stakeholders.
* Identify and understand important stakeholder issues.
* Seek out greater involvement from various groups early in the review of the Project.
* Inform landowners/abutters, agencies and the public about the Project with consistent and timely messages.
* Strive to achieve consensus and settlements among the stakeholders and the company about an acceptable Project design.
* Provide written information to landowners when land agents contact them. This information includes a description of the field survey process and overall information on the Project. Where necessary, GridAmerica will work with landowners to gather information that may be needed to help GridAmerica with its field surveys.
* Address requests, issues and information from stakeholders in a timely, informative manner.
* Ensure internal staff and contractors understand GridAmerica’s approach and commitment to communications and outreach.
* Allow for flexibility to address unanticipated needs, issues and concerns as they arise.

## Defining the Stakeholders

There are many different stakeholders involved in the planning and approval process of an interstate electric transmission project. The GSPL stakeholder engagement team, described below, takes care in defining the stakeholders to ensure that all are made aware of and incorporated into the project process. The information provided below highlights core groups of stakeholders, but is not inclusive of all stakeholders that will be communicated to and/or coordinated with throughout the life of the project.

**U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)**

The DOE is a federal agency that regulates the interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas, and oil. A Presidential Permit from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is required for the construction, connection, operation and/or maintenance of electric transmission lines that cross the U.S. international borders with Canada and Mexico. Executive Order 12038 states that, before a Presidential permit may be issued, the action must be found to be consistent with the public interest as it relates to environmental impact and impact on electric reliability. After compliance with NEPA and satisfaction of the electric reliability criteria, E.O. 12038 requires DOE to obtain concurrence from the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense before a permit may be issued.

Stakeholders for the Granite State Power Link project include:

* Landowners and abutters,
* community leaders,
* US DOE,
* local, state and federal agencies and government officials,
* non‐governmental organizations (NGOs) including business, environmental, homeowner and others, and
* others as identified.

The time required to process an application for a Presidential permit is usually determined by the extent of the environmental analysis. A decision on a permit may be reached within six months if it is determined that the issuance of a permit is not a major federal action significantly affecting the environment and that an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review for NEPA compliance. However, if it is determined that an Environmental Impact Statement would be required to adequately address the full environmental consequences of the proposed action, the time for processing the permit application could take 18 months or longer.

**Vermont and New Hampshire State Siting Authorities**

The states of Vermont and New Hampshire have their respective state siting authorities that are responsible for the review and approval of electric transmission projects. Each state process contains numerous steps and opportunities for public involvement facilitated directly by the company as well as the regulatory authority. It takes approximately 12 months to receive state approvals. GridAmerica will be responsible for demonstrating the need, public good and environmental and engineering efforts that have been and will be undertaken for the project. GridAmerica will facilitate public hearings and information sessions in accordance with the respective state siting regulations to further engage the public.

**Local, State, Regional and Federal Agencies/Officials**

Local, state, and federal agencies and officials are involved in different aspects of permitting and education of GSPL. GSPL will coordinate with the following stakeholders during the course of the project through introductory briefings, follow up meetings and any required permitting or easement discussions:

* **Local**: Town and/or County Councils, planning boards, zoning boards, conservation commissions, etc.
* **State**: Environmental agencies, historic preservation offices, fish and wildlife agencies, etc.
* **Regional**: regional planning organizations and or economic development authorities.
* **Federal**: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, etc.

**Local Citizens and Landowners/Abutters**

Input from local residents and landowners/abutters is highly encouraged as they have an interest in electric transmission projects and how their local community and land will be affected. Local citizens and landowners/abutters within the vicinity of a proposed project will be notified of the project through multiple levels of communication at key points of progress or activity. Project notifications will be done through a variety of methods, including direct mail, local newspaper advertisements/legal notices, door-to-door canvassing, email updates, etc.

Landowners and abutters directly affected by the Project will be contacted by GSPL. An affected landowner and/or abutter are defined per Vermont and New Hampshire regulatory authorities. Typically, this includes those properties that are:

* directly affected (i.e., crossed or used) by the proposed activity and assets, rights of way, and access roads, and
* abutting either side of an existing right-of-way or facility site, or abuts the edge of a proposed facility site or right-of-way which runs along a property line in the area in which the facilities would be constructed, or contains a residence within 300 feet of the proposed construction work area (NH only).

**Environmental Groups and NGOs**

Coordinating with specialized organizations that have a keen interest in the environmental, economic or other local and regional issues in a project’s footprint provides good feedback to the project team. Incorporating the voice of these organizations makes for a project that can better meet the short and long-term needs of the broader community.

## Granite State Power Link Project Team

Once a project has been conceptualized and business agreements have been made to advance a project, GridAmerica establishes a fully integrated Project Team. The GSPL Project Team is comprised of experienced personnel from various departments including, but not limited to: Engineering; Land and Right of Way; Environmental; Business Development; Construction; Marketing and Public Relations; Rates and Regulation; Government/Local Affairs; Media Relations; Legal; and, Operations. The Project Team is responsible for the design, permitting, and operation of the Project.

**Examples of Milestones and information to be communicated:**

* Project Launch
* Major regulatory/permitting activities
* Open Houses/Community Meetings
* Project Status Reports
* Public Briefings and Events
* News Coverage
* Engineering Updates/Changes
* Project Approvals
* Construction Activities

**Stakeholder Engagement Team**

The goal of GSPL is to be proactive with public communications in order to educate the public on the project and its benefits, as well as resolve any issues or concerns early in the process. The Public Outreach Representatives will facilitate communications internally and externally to achieve this goal.

The role of the Public Outreach Representatives is to coordinate consistent and current information to interested stakeholders of the Project. In addition, the Public Outreach Representatives will be responsible for making sure that all stakeholders understand the overall process.

In order to keep stakeholders informed, the Public Outreach Representatives will provide:

* Project messaging;
* Public briefings, meetings and open houses;
* Scheduling interactions between the Project Team and stakeholders;
* Media outreach and inquiries;
* Documenting and providing feedback on any contact with stakeholders;
* Creation and management of the virtual toolbox, including the website and Twitter feed;
* Project updates for stakeholders;
* creation and upkeep of external project communications and educational materials;
* any additional support needed to ensure that all stakeholders are involved and kept apprised of Project updates; and,
* strategic guidance and evaluation efforts to improve public outreach and communications.

## Stakeholder Engagement Outreach & Materials

There are various components of materials and outreach that will become the foundation for stakeholder engagement throughout the life of the project. The project outreach team is focused on key milestones (RFP, permitting and state siting, pre-construction, construction and post-construction) as it relates to stakeholder engagement. Below outlines the broad activities and materials executed or planned for project outreach.

At a minimum, the following communication **materials** have or will be created for the project to enable stakeholder engagement:

* project fact sheet(s)
* Frequently Asked Questions
* Visuals – maps, photo simulations, route layout
* PowerPoint presentations
* Videos/podcasts
* Letters, mailers and notifications
* Email updates
* Crew pads for field work
* Door hangers/sticky notes
* Public commentary on project
* Newspaper advertisements

At a minimum, the following stakeholder **outreach tactics** have or will be implemented:

* Briefings, presentations and roundtable discussions
* Regular one-on-one meetings/check-ins with key stakeholders
* Kitchen Table Meetings/Door-to-Door with project abutters/landowners
* Community Meetings where the entire route host community is invited to participate in a tradeshow-style event to interact directly with subject matter experts
* Media briefings, advertisements and press releases
* Social media engagement with thought leaders and abutters
* Partnership/support building
* Construction Communications and Outreach Plan

The team has established the following **communications tools** for direct interaction with stakeholders:

* Project website: [www.granitestatepowerlink.com](http://www.granitestatepowerlink.com)
* Project email: [info@granitestatepowerlink.com](mailto:info@granitestatepowerlink.com)
* Project hotline: 1-855-603-GSPL (toll free)
* Twitter handle: @GSPowerLink