

**BEFORE THE  
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF WISCONSIN**

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Joint Application of American Transmission Company LLC and Northern States Power Company-Wisconsin, as Electric Public Utilities, for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Rebuild Existing Transmission Infrastructure and Construct and Operate Long Range Transmission Planning Tranche 1 Project 6, a New 345 kV Transmission Line Connecting the Tremval-Arpin-Columbia Substations in the Counties of Trempealeau, Wood, and Columbia, Wisconsin, to be known as the Grid Forward Central Wisconsin Project.

Docket No. 5-CE-157

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**DIRECT TESTIMONY OF CHRISTOPHER WRUCK ON BEHALF OF THE  
VILLAGE OF MERRILLAN**

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1 **Q. Please state your name, business address, and occupation.**

2 A. My name is Chris Wruck, and I serve as President and Zoning Administrator of  
3 the Village of Merrilan. My business address is 101 S. Main, Merrilan,  
4 Wisconsin 54754.

5 **Q. Please state your educational background and experience.**

6 A. I received an Associates of Arts in Information Technology, a B.S. in  
7 organization security and management, and an M.S. in administration of justice  
8 and security from University of Phoenix.

9 I have been on the Village Board in Merrilan for approximately seven years and  
10 have been Zoning Administrator and President for approximately two-and-a-  
11 half years. My duties on the Board and as President include overseeing general  
12 operations of the Village, addressing issues and upgrades, and making final  
13 decisions. I also work with local law enforcement to enforce ordinances and  
14 address noncompliance with ordinances. As Zoning Administrator, I review  
15 applications to determine if requirements have been met and sign off on  
16 approved permits.

1 My employment history includes working at Century Link for over 10 years in  
2 the internal resource center. Currently, I am an emergency services  
3 communications officer, and I own and operate an information technology  
4 business. I have lived in the Village of Merrilan for over ten years.

5 **Q. Have you testified before this Commission before?**

6 A. No, I have not.

7 **Q. On whose behalf are you testifying in this proceeding?**

8 A. I am testifying on behalf of the Village of Merrilan ("the Village").

9 **Q. What is the purpose of your direct testimony?**

10 A. The purpose of my testimony is to discuss the Grid Forward Central Wisconsin  
11 Project as it relates to the Village. Specifically, I will discuss the routing of the 345  
12 kV transmission line's Primary Route through the Village, the impacts of this  
13 route on the Village, and potential alternatives.

14 **Q. Are you providing any exhibits to go along with your testimony? If so, please  
15 list them.**

16 A. Yes, I am sponsoring the following Exhibits:

17 Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1: Map and Photographs of Pole Locations

18 Ex.-VOM-Wruck-2: Map showing proximity to Lincoln Elementary

19 Ex.-VOM-Wruck-3: Map of VOM's Proposed Minor Re-route

20 Ex.-VOM-Wruck-4: Applicants' Response to Village of Merrilan's First Set  
21 of Discovery

22 **Q. Are you familiar with the Grid Forward Central Wisconsin Project?**

23 A. Yes. I have reviewed all or parts of the Application and Appendices, draft  
24 Environmental Impact Statement, and relevant data request responses. I have  
25 been in contact with Michael White, local relations representative for ATC, and  
26 the Project has been discussed by the Village Board.

27 **Q. Please describe the Village of Merrilan.**

28 A. The Village is located in Jackson County, north of Black River Falls and Interstate  
29 94. It is approximately 1.34 square miles. It was founded in the 1870s when the

1 railroad was routed through our location. The Village offers full services to its  
2 residents and has its own electric, water, and sewer utility. It is part of the Alma  
3 Center-Humbird-Merrillan School District and is home to Lincoln Elementary  
4 School. Halls Creek runs through the Village and dams at two locations create  
5 Oakwood Lake and Trow Lake. Oakwood Lake has a waterfall surrounded by a  
6 park.

7 **Q. How would you describe the community in the Village?**

8 A. Merrillan is a small, close-knit community with a population of just under 600  
9 residents. Our local economy depends heavily on tourism, outdoor recreation,  
10 and the preservation of our historic sites and natural landscapes. Our community  
11 is proud of its scenic waterfall, the historic railroad depot, the Depot Hotel and  
12 Saloon, the Merrillan Café, the large water tower, and the surrounding natural  
13 areas that draw visitors and support local businesses. The Village is described as  
14 a “Christmas Tree Village” due to the number of beautiful evergreen trees in our  
15 community.

16 **Q. What is your understanding of the Grid Forward Central Wisconsin Project as  
17 it passes through the Village?**

18 A. I understand the Primary Route of the project will pass through the Village along  
19 a railroad corridor. That portion of the Village is characterized by an apartment  
20 building, homes, and businesses, along with Lincoln Elementary School. The  
21 Primary Route would also go over East Fork Halls Creek, through a wooded  
22 area, and near the Village’s wells. There will be approximately 6 poles along the  
23 right-of-way in the Village, and the poles will be approximately 115 to 125 feet  
24 tall. According to Mr. White, who spoke with the supervisor of the Village’s  
25 Public Works office, Chris Danielson, and assistant supervisor, Michael Garbers,  
26 the typical ROW width for this line would be 150 feet. As explained in the  
27 Application, all vegetation will be cleared for the width of the ROW. Ex.-  
28 Applicants-Application, PSC ERF Ref. #529025 at 116 of 222. This would mean

1 that much of the existing vegetation and trees in this area will be destroyed to  
2 accommodate the line.

3 **Q. Please summarize the Village's concerns regarding the proposed Grid Forward**  
4 **Central Wisconsin Project.**

5 A. The Village of Merrilan is concerned about the portion of the Primary Route that  
6 would bisect the Village. The specific concerns are categorized as follows:

- 7 • Impact of proposed pole locations and line right-of-way
- 8 • Environmental Impacts
- 9 • Infrastructure Impacts
- 10 • Community Impacts
- 11 • Visual Impacts
- 12 • Safety Impacts
- 13 • Utility facility impacts

14 **Q. Do your exhibits relate to any of these issues?**

15 A. Yes. I created Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1, which utilizes routing maps from the  
16 Application, to highlight pole locations in the Village. I added yellow boxes  
17 around the poles on the map. The exhibit then matches pole numbers from the  
18 maps to photographs I took showing the view from the pole location looking in  
19 different directions. Ex.-VOM-Wruck-2 was created the same way to show the  
20 proximity of the line to Lincoln Elementary school, with a yellow box around the  
21 school.

22 **Q. Please describe the Village's concerns with the pole locations and right-of-**  
23 **way.**

24 A. The Village has concerns about the proposed locations of poles and the line right-  
25 of-way, due to proximity to area businesses, water sources, and the likelihood of  
26 tree removal as a result. Specifically:

- 27 • Pole #3036: This pole is located in the busy Merrilan Cafe parking lot and  
28 directly adjacent to an existing gas station. Because this pole would be in  
29 the parking lot, it is likely that this would limit customer access to local

businesses as fewer parking spots would be available, both during construction and operation. It would also have aesthetic impacts. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.)

- Pole #3037: This pole is located in the yard of an apartment complex that predominately houses the elderly, with the ROW cutting through the complex property. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.) The Village has concerns about the proximity to this apartment building and the potential impacts to stability and safety of the building and its residents. The line also intersects with other existing powerlines belonging to the Village's electric utility, Merrilan Electric and Water Utility, which could complicate safety and maintenance. This is because the Village's powerlines are shorter than the height of the lines proposed by ATC. If Village Utility employees are performing maintenance on the Village's powerlines, there could be safety concerns as ATC's lines would be over their heads as they work. This could also delay time to resolution in an outage because of potential additional steps needed to work around ATC's lines.

Crucially, the ROW to the west of Pole #3037 would run above the Railroad Depot and near our historic Merrilan Depot Hotel and Saloon and the Merrilan Café—mainstays of our community and vital to our local economy and identity. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.) The lines' proximity to these landmarks and residential neighborhoods would significantly impact their aesthetic appeal and historic integrity.

- Pole #3038: This pole is positioned next to one of our existing utility rights-of-way that crosses the railroad. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.) It would severely impact the landscape and green space. Pole #3038 will require the removal of many trees because the pole and the right of way footprint are in a forested area. Also, the lines run directly behind a large apartment complex and a vacant village property that has been discussed as a location for future development. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.)

Also, Lincoln Elementary backs up to the portion of the line between Poles 3037 and 3038. In between the school building and the transmission line is a playground and baseball field, as well as a structure used as a storage shed by the school. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-2.) Students routinely play in this area. The Village is extremely concerned about the proximity of the line to the school and homes. Placement of a pole and line here would also limit future development for the vacant property.

- Pole #3039: This pole is situated right at the edge of McBride Street, where a grove of trees extends along McBride to North Hayden Street. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.) Based on the maps, all of these trees – many of which are part of our community’s landscape and natural environment – would be removed, causing further environmental and aesthetic impacts. This location is also close in proximity to the homes on McBride Street.
- Pole #3040: This location encroaches toward the East Fork Halls Creek and the Village’s water wells, including the railroad bridge and a very large culvert. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.) This area is predominately wooded, and the Village is concerned about tree removal and disruption to wildlife habitats as a result of construction. The Village is also concerned about potential impacts from construction on its water resources and water quality due to the proximity of the lines and pole to the Village’s wells, potentially affecting our vital water infrastructure.
- Pole #3041: This pole is located near a property currently served by existing power lines, with lines running to a citizen’s property just north of this location. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.) As with other poles, there are significant concerns about the removal of existing trees and vegetation, as required to accommodate a pole in this location.

**Q. What are the Village’s concerns about the environmental impacts of the Proposed Route?**

1 A. As mentioned above, the Village is concerned about clearing extensive  
2 vegetation and trees along the proposed route as it passes through the Village.  
3 Many of the trees that would be removed because of the proposed routing are  
4 part of the “Christmas Tree Village.” Removing these trees would threaten the  
5 Village’s historic landscape and diminish our scenic beauty, ecological health,  
6 and cultural identity. The Village is also concerned about potential impacts to the  
7 East Fork Halls Creek, as the Primary Route will cross the creek between Poles  
8 #3039 and #3040.

9 **Q. What are the Village’s concerns about the impacts to infrastructure as a result**  
10 **of the proposed route?**

11 A. The Village is concerned about the line’s construction impact on roads,  
12 underground utilities, and above-ground infrastructure. The Village is planning  
13 necessary road maintenance projects for the next several years, including on  
14 roads just north of the Primary Route and on McBride Street. This needed  
15 maintenance may need to be delayed due to the construction of the lines, as it  
16 would be difficult for both projects to be conducted simultaneously. Similarly,  
17 the Village needs to update its water, sewer, and electric lines, as this  
18 infrastructure is outdated. The construction of the Primary Route could impact  
19 these construction timelines, which could also impact the Village’s ability to  
20 prevent outages. The Village is concerned about the continuing impact to the  
21 Village’s infrastructure once the transmission lines are operational, as it creates  
22 many uncertainties for the Village, such as the need to coordinate road  
23 construction and electric utility updates with ATC. This may require hiring  
24 additional Village personnel in the Public Works office.

25 **Q. What are the Village’s concerns about the community impacts of this route?**

26 A. The lines will run very close to residential neighborhoods, including two multi-  
27 tenant apartment complexes. Village residents have raised safety concerns,  
28 concern about property value impacts, and potential restrictions on future land  
29 use and development. Additionally, the presence of these high-voltage lines and

towers threatens to hinder future development opportunities on adjacent properties, including the vacant Village land and existing residential and commercial properties.

**Q. What are the Village’s concerns about the visual impacts of this route?**

A. The visual intrusion from the lines and towers will diminish the scenic beauty of Merrilan’s locations such as the waterfall off Mill Street and Oakwood Lake, which is being considered for historic designation by the Wisconsin Historical Society. (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-1.) The loss of trees that are part of Merrilan’s landscape and history – particularly those forming the “Christmas Tree Village” – will significantly alter the visual and ecological character of our community. The impacts on our historic landmarks – such as the Railroad Depot, the Depot Hotel and Saloon, and the water tower – are especially troubling given their importance to Merrilan’s identity and heritage. The line would be visible from these locations and would permanently alter the Village’s scenic sites and historic landmarks.

**Q. What are the Village’s concerns about the safety impacts of this route?**

A. The center line is planned to be just over 300 feet from our elementary school, and even closer to the school’s baseball field (approximately 188 feet), school garage (approximately 132 feet), and the school’s open wooded area, which the school regularly uses for student activities (approximately 172 feet). (Ex.-VOM-Wruck-2.) In addition, the school district has been planning the construction of a storm shelter and daycare on the elementary school site. The school district is in the process of applying for a grant from FEMA for the storm shelter; however, the location would be near the ROW for the Primary Route. The Village is concerned about potential safety risks for children and staff and impacts on the proposed projects. The same is true for the residential homes that are close to the proposed route.

The Village is concerned about the potential interference from high-voltage lines that could be problematic for our critical communication systems, including our



1 SCADA system which operates at both of our water wells, HAM radio, and other  
2 radio services used for safety and operations. The Village operates non-repeated  
3 VHF radio communications on our Public Works system and VHF emergency  
4 communications at our Fire Station for emergency services and communications  
5 with the 9-1-1 Communications Center.

6 **Q. Aside from those already mentioned, is the Village aware of any other present**  
7 **or future projects that could be affected by the Proposed Route?**

8 A. Yes. The Village received a grant from the Public Service Commission's Rural  
9 Energy Startup Program to upgrade its outdated electric system. The Village  
10 hired an electric engineer, Heather Andrew of Power Systems Engineering (PSE),  
11 using these funds and was hoping to begin construction on upgrades on a  
12 timeline similar to the timeline of ATC and NSPW's project. The Proposed Route  
13 has resulted in a number of uncertainties regarding utility service in the Village.  
14 Additionally, as mentioned above, the Village has been discussing using the  
15 vacant village property near Pole # 3038 for future development. Because of the  
16 width of the ROW of the Primary Route, this may not be possible.

17 **Q. How is land around the project zoned?**

18 The majority of the proposed Primary Route through the Village would be  
19 surrounded by land zoned as either residential or as the "Conservancy District."  
20 Per Village ordinance, the Conservancy District "provides for the preservation  
21 and protection of scenic, historic, and scientific and biologically important areas  
22 and for the protection of ground water sources." This zoning also "delineates  
23 those areas where substantial development of land in the form of buildings or  
24 structures is prohibited due to" either "special or unusual conditions of  
25 topography, drainage, flood plain, or other natural conditions, whereby  
26 considerable damage to buildings or structures and possible loss of life may  
27 occur due to the processes of nature" or "lack of proper facilities or  
28 improvements resulting in the land not being suitable for improvement at the  
29 present time." The Conservancy District is also used for areas subject to flooding.

1 While the Ordinance permits the use of the Conservancy District for utilities,  
2 uses that would disturb natural fauna and flora are generally prohibited.

3 **Q. Does the Village have any concerns about the construction process?**

4 A. Yes. It is important to note that construction impacts will be widespread  
5 throughout Merrilan. The Village is not large, but the line will run most of its  
6 length, affecting roads, underground utilities, and above-ground infrastructure  
7 during the entire installation process, creating significant safety hazards, and  
8 disrupting services across the Village.

9 **Q. Has the Village considered alternatives that would avoid the impacts you have**  
10 **identified?**

11 A. Yes. In comments prepared in the Commission's environmental impact  
12 statement process, the Village proposed a short re-reroute of the Proposed Route  
13 that would pass north of the Village. The map depicting this re-route is Ex.-  
14 VOM-Wruck-3. It would follow road right-of-ways for most of its length and  
15 avoid the impacts I have described above. The Village would be satisfied with  
16 this route or a similar re-route that would avoid passing through the Village. The  
17 Alternative Route would also avoid the Village, but the Village does not oppose  
18 the Proposed Route as long as it is routed around the Village.

19 **Q. Have the Applicants commented on the Village's short reroute?**

20 A. Yes. The Applicants commented on the route in response to the Village's data  
21 requests. A copy of their responses is attached as Ex.-VOM-Wruck-4.

22 **Q. Do you have any response to the Applicants' comments?**

23 A. Yes. While the Applicants assert that the Primary Route attempts to minimize the  
24 Project's impacts to the Village, it does not appear that the Applicants have  
25 considered or addressed the many of the concerns outlined here. Additionally,  
26 the Applicants did not acknowledge the proximity to Lincoln Elementary School.  
27 The fact that the Village might receive impact fees as a result does not make up  
28 for the potential impact on the Village. The Applicants were able to avoid similar  
29 impacts in other jurisdictions.

1    **Q.    Do you have any additional comments regarding this proceeding?**

2    A.    Yes. The Village respectfully urges the Commission to carefully evaluate the  
3           impacts I have described and to consider and select alternative routes that avoid  
4           Merrilan entirely. Preservation of our historic sites, natural landscapes, and  
5           community integrity must be prioritized. The Commission's review should  
6           include impacts on visual aesthetics, historic landmarks, safety, and community  
7           well-being.

8    **Q.    Does this conclude your pre-filed direct testimony?**

9    A.    Yes.