US Army Corps of Engineers
St Paul District

Public Notice

APPLICANT: Wisconsin Public Service Corporation, Minnesota Power and American Transmission Company

ISSUED: 02 April 2004
EXPIRES: 31 May 2004

REFER TO: 03-04029-TJF

SECTION: 404 - Clean Water Act and 10 - Rivers & Harbors Act of 1899

PUBLIC NOTICE OF PERMIT APPLICATION
RELEASE OF DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers has received an application for a Department of the Army permit from the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation, Minnesota Power and the American Transmission Company. The application requests approval under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act to cross navigable waters and discharge fill material into wetlands during the construction of an aerial 345kV electric transmission line from Oliver, Wisconsin to near Wausau, Wisconsin. The project is referred to as the Arrowhead to Weston line.

This notice also announces the release of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) by the U.S. National Park Service (NPS). The NPS has prepared a DEIS which considers the potential impacts of installing an electrical transmission line across the Namekagon River, a Federally listed Wild and Scenic River, at a location southwest of Hayward, Wisconsin. The Corps of Engineers was a cooperating agency in the preparation of this DEIS.

1. SPECIFIC INFORMATION.

APPLICANTS' ADDRESS: Wisconsin Public Service Corporation
700, North Adams Street
P.O. Box 19002
Green Bay, WI 54307-9002

Minnesota Power
30 West Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802

American Transmission Company
N 19 W 23993 Ridgeview Parkway West
Waukesha, WI 53187-0047

PROJECT LOCATION: The project extends across approximately 208 miles and portions of 8 counties in northern and central Wisconsin. These

counties are: Douglas, Washburn, Sawyer, Rusk, Chippewa, Taylor, Clark and Marathon. The project would cross many wetlands and several streams and rivers. Seven of the rivers to be crossed are considered as navigable waters by Corps of Engineers definition. These include the: St. Louis River, Nemadji, Chippewa, Thornapple, Black and Wisconsin. In addition, the Namekagon River is a component of the Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Throughout much of the proposed route alignment the transmission line would follow corridors of existing utility lines, pipelines, roads or railroads. The proposed alignment would avoid crossing any reservation lands. Specifically, in the area of the southwest portion of the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation the route has been moved to avoid crossing reservation land.

The proposed route generally runs southeast from Oliver, Wisconsin toward Exeland (this segment is referred to as the Oliver 1 Modified route). From Exeland the route runs southeast toward Owen and then east to Weston (this segment is referred to as the Owen 4 route).

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT: According to the applicant, the purpose of the project is to improve the reliability of the existing electric transmission system between Minnesota and Wisconsin. The purpose of the project is further described in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was prepared by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin PSCW) in October 2000; and in a Final Decision made by the PSCW in October 2001. Studies in the 1990s reviewed reliability issues of power supply adequacy and power system security.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The transmission line structures would be self-supporting, single pole tubular steel structures. In some areas the line would carry a single circuit; in others where the new route would follow an existing line, the new pole structure would carry both lines, and be considered a double circuit. The single circuit poles would generally be between 100 and 130 feet tall. The double circuit poles would generally be 115 to 145 feet tall. The approximate span length would vary from 600 to 1,000 feet dependent upon the circuit and the structure type.

Cast-in-place reinforced concrete foundations would support the poles. They would generally be 20 to 50 feet in depth and between 6 and 10 feet in diameter.

The typical right-of-way for the transmission line is 120 feet. In many areas the new line would use or share the existing right-of-way of an existing utility. A full 60 feet of right-of-way would be needed on each side of the centerline where no sharing exists.

AREA OF FILL: It has been estimated that a maximum of 225 poles may need to be located in wetland areas - a total of about 1,500 poles would be installed along the entire 208 mile long route. The total area of wetland that would be permanently filled by the pole foundations has been estimated at about 0.4 acre. It is this discharge of dredged/fill material at the pole foundations in waters

of the United States, including wetlands, that is regulated by the Corps under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

VEGETATION IN AFFECTED AREA: Utilizing the Wisconsin Wetland Inventory mapping, the applicant has indicated that about 40% of the poles located in wetlands would be placed in scrub shrub habitat; another 30% would be in forested areas and approximately 20% would be in emergent wetland complexes. Tree and shrub vegetation would be removed in all wetlands under the conductors. Similar clearing would be done in upland areas.

NAVIGABLE WATER CROSSINGS: As mentioned above, the proposed route would require the line to cross 7 navigable waters. Drawings showing the proposed crossings are attached to this notice.

*St. Louis River - the proposed crossing is at the location of an existing 115kV line and adjacent to an existing double-decker bridge serving vehicles and railroad traffic. The bridge clearance point is at 622.7 feet. The low point of the proposed transmission line is 662.8 feet, which would be 57.8 feet above the 100 year flood elevation of 605 feet. The project involves dismantling the existing line and poles and installing double circuit single poles to support both the existing 115kV line and the proposed 345kV line.

*Nemadji River - the proposed crossing would run parallel to two railroad trestles, and would cross within the corridor of the existing downstream bridge. The railroad bridge clearance is 657.5 feet. The proposed low point of the line is 665.0 feet, which would be 47.0 feet above the high water elevation of 618.0 feet.

*Chippewa River - the proposed crossing would run about 700 feet upstream (north) of an existing underground petroleum pipeline. The clearance of the nearest bridge (located about 1.6 miles upstream) is 1163.0 feet. The low point of the line would be 1149.1 feet, which is 50.1 feet above the high water elevation of 1099.0 feet.

*Thornapple River - the proposed crossing would run adjacent to an existing petroleum pipeline crossing. The existing cleared right-of-way would need to be widened. The clearance of a nearby bridge (about 1.6 miles upstream) is 1110.9 feet. The low point of the line would be 1158.3 feet, which is 57.8 feet above the high water elevation of 1100.5 feet.

*Black River - the proposed crossing is at the location of an existing 115kV line right-of-way. The existing line and poles would be dismantled and new structures supporting the existing 115kV line and the proposed 345kV line would be installed within the existing right-of-way. The clearance of an existing bridge (about 0.46 mile downstream) is 1193.3 feet. The low point of the line would be 1227.5 feet, which is 41.8 feet above the high water elevation of 1185.7 feet.

*Wisconsin River - the proposed crossing would be within the corridor of an existing 345kV line and a 46kV line. The new and existing 46kV and 345kV line would be triple circuited on new two and three pole

structures. The low point of the new clearance of the double 345kV line would be higher than the current clearance. The clearance of a nearby bridge (about 0.9 mile upstream) is 1163.3 feet. The low point of the new line would be 1189.8 feet, which would be 46.0 feet above the high water elevation of 1143.8 feet.

*Namekagon River - the proposed crossing is at the location of an existing 161kV overhead line, and adjacent to two underground crude oil pipelines. Existing railroad trestles are located about 1/4 mile downstream and about 1/3 mile upstream. The existing 161kV Xcel line, now on an "H" frame wood structure 70 feet tall, would be dismantled and a new double circuited 345/161kV line would be installed. The clearance at the nearby bridge is 1139.2 feet. The low point of the new line would be 1175.4 feet, which would be 39.4 feet above the high water elevation of 1136.0 feet.

This proposed crossing of the Namekagon River is being evaluated by the US National Park Service through the preparation of an EIS. During discussions with the NPS, the applicant has made a design change in the structures to be used at the Namekagon crossing to minimize potential visual impacts. The span length would be increased to about 1,500 feet from 950 feet shown on the plans. Also, the shield wires at the top of the structure would be eliminated, thereby allowing the height to be reduced from about 140 feet to 125 feet. This would occur at the river crossing and the two spans adjacent to the river. The applicant would also plant mature trees in appropriate locations to provide visual screening.

Typical structure designs and an existing condition drawing are attached to this notice.

SURROUNDING LAND USE: The line would pass through a variety of rural and urban land uses. However, as mentioned above a majority of the line would utilize existing corridors.

ALTERNATIVES: The EIS and PSCW decision discuss alternatives that were considered, including power generation and conservation alternatives. Transmission system and routing alternatives were also considered. Other generation options and conservation and use of renewable resources were not considered viable alternatives because of limitations of the existing system and costs. The proposed project represents the method and route selected by the PSCW after it considered all impacts described in the EIS.

The DEIS prepared for the Namekagon River crossing provides additional information regarding possible alternatives, including underground crossings, at this location.

THE FOLLOWING PRECAUTIONS TO MINIMIZE IMPACTS AND PROTECT WETLANDS HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED BY THE APPLICANT: The applicant indicated that all material excavated for the wetland pole foundations would be hauled away and placed in uplands. When vehicle access is required in wetlands this work would be done in dry periods or frozen conditions. Specialized tracked vehicles and work mats

would be used to minimize disturbance to the wetlands. No temporary or permanent access roads would be built using earthen fill material.

2. REPLIES/COMMENTS.

Interested parties are invited to submit to this office written facts, arguments, or objections within 60 days of the date of this notice. These statements should bear upon the suitability of the location and the adequacy of the project and should, if appropriate, suggest any changes believed to be desirable. Comments received may be forwarded to the applicant.

Replies may be addressed to Regulatory Branch, St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, 190 Fifth Street East, Saint Paul, MN 55101-1638.

Or, if you have questions regarding the project, call Timothy J. Fell at the St. Paul office of the Corps, telephone number (651) 290-5360.

Copies of this public notice may be found on the St. Paul District's web site at -
http//www.mvp.usace.army.mil/regulatory/mn_ip/200304029.pdf

Copies of the public notice have also been sent to public libraries in the following communities: Superior, Solon Springs, Hayward, Ladysmith, Thorp, Abbotsford, and Wausau.

Questions or comments regarding the DEIS on the Namekagon River crossing may be directed to Ms. Jill Medland at the NPS. Written responses should be sent to the St, Croix National Scenic Riverway, P.O. Box 708, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin 54024

3. FEDERALLY-LISTED THREATENED OR ENDANGERED WILDLIFE OR PLANTS OR THEIR CRITICAL HABITAT.

Several Federally listed threatened or endangered species are found in the counties which would be crossed by the proposed transmission line. These include: Bald eagle, Canada lynx, Gray wolf, Piping plover, Kirtland's warbler, Eastern massasauga, and Karner blue butterfly.

This application is being coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Any comments it may have concerning Federally-listed threatened or endangered wildlife or plants or their critical habitat will be considered in our final assessment of the described work.

4. JURISDICTION.

This project comes under the regulatory jurisdiction of the Corps of Engineers because several navigable waters would be crossed by the proposed transmission line and fill material would be placed within waters of the United States, including wetland areas, for pole foundations.

REGULATORY AUTHORITY: This application will be reviewed according to the provisions of Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 for the crossings of navigable waters and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for the discharge of fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands. Therefore, our public interest review will consider the guidelines set forth under Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act (40 Code of Federal Regulations 230).

Although the proposed line is about 208 miles in length, the St. Paul District has made a preliminary determination that about 50 miles of the route is within the scope of Corps review. These 50 miles include the permit areas where the pole foundations are located within waters and wetlands, and the immediately adjacent uplands. In areas where there are multiple wetland impacts and greater Federal control, the permit area has been expanded to include the upland areas interspersed among the wetlands. The other areas of the route which avoid direct filling of wetlands or segments which cross long stretches of upland areas are not within the Corps scope of analysis. These permit areas are shown on the attached maps.

THE APPLICANT HAS STATED THAT THE FOLLOWING STATE APPROVAL HAS BEEN ISSUED: The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin has approved a route that is called the Oliver 1 Modified route and the Owen 4 route. The approval is called a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN). Permits will also be required from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for various aspects of the project.

5. WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION.

This Public Notice has been sent to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and is considered by the District Engineer to constitute valid notification to that agency for water quality certification.

A permit will not be granted until the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has issued Section 401 certification.

6. HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL.

This public notice is being sent to the National Park Service, the State Archaeologist, and the State Historic Preservation Officer to determine what known cultural resources may be affected by the described work; or whether any unknown archaeological, scientific, or historical data could be lost or destroyed by the work described in the permit application.

During the preparation of the EIS by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, the applicant coordinated with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW) regarding potential impacts to cultural resources. Several known historic or archaeological sites were identified along the proposed route segments.

Coordination meetings have been held with Corps staff, Tribal contacts and the applicant's consultant in attempts to identify other places of traditional cultural importance. Also, additional coordination efforts have been undertaken by the NPS during the preparation of its DEIS for the Namekagon River crossing portion of the project.

At this time the Corps believes its permit jurisdiction and scope of analysis regarding cultural resources is limited to the relatively small permit areas, described above, where the transmission line poles are located within wetlands, and where the line crosses navigable waters, and the upland areas immediately adjacent to these locations. Interested parties may provide information on places of traditional cultural importance that may be located within the project right-of-way and in an area 1/2 mile on either side of the proposed route.

7. PUBLIC HEARING REQUESTS.

Any person may request, in writing, within the comment period specified in this notice, that a public hearing be held to consider this application. Requests for public hearings shall state, in detail, the reasons for holding a public hearing. A request may be denied if substantive reasons for holding a hearing are not provided or if there is otherwise no valid interest to be served.

The applicant has indicated that several public information meetings were held in 1999 and 2000 regarding this proposal. The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin also held several public hearings and technical hearings in 2000, 2001 and 2003 that allowed the public an opportunity to provide testimony on the project.

8. PUBLIC INTEREST REVIEW.

The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefit which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered, including the cumulative effects. Among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, cultural values, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, floodplain values, land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people. Environmental and other documents will be available for review in the St. Paul District Office.

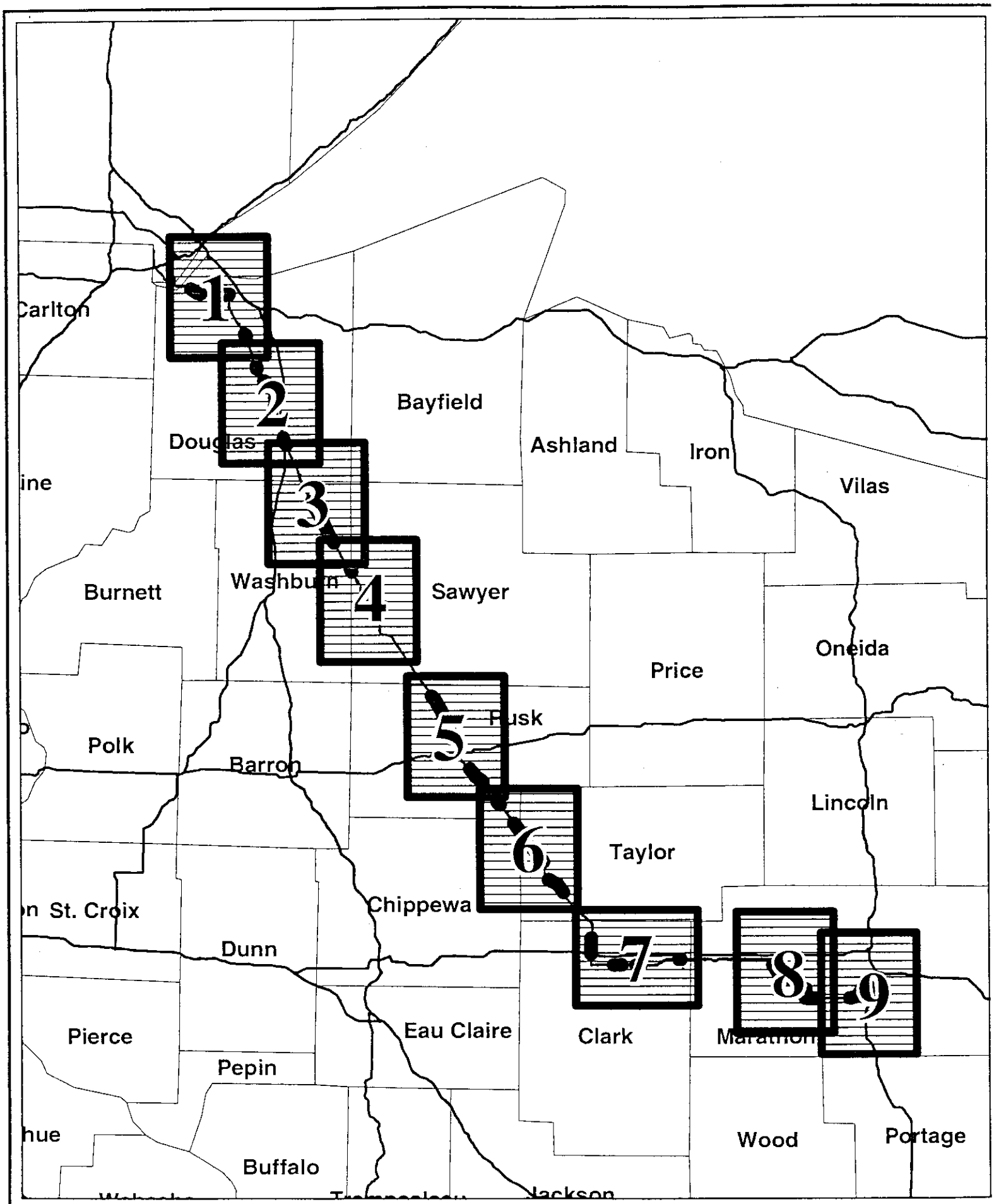
The Corps of Engineers is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Indian tribes; and

other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps of Engineers to determine whether to issue, modify, condition, or deny a permit for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of an Environmental Assessment and/or an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

Ralph J. Augustin
Chief, Metro Permit Section

Enclosures

NOTICE TO EDITORS: This public notice is provided as background information and is not a request or contract for publication.



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Map Key

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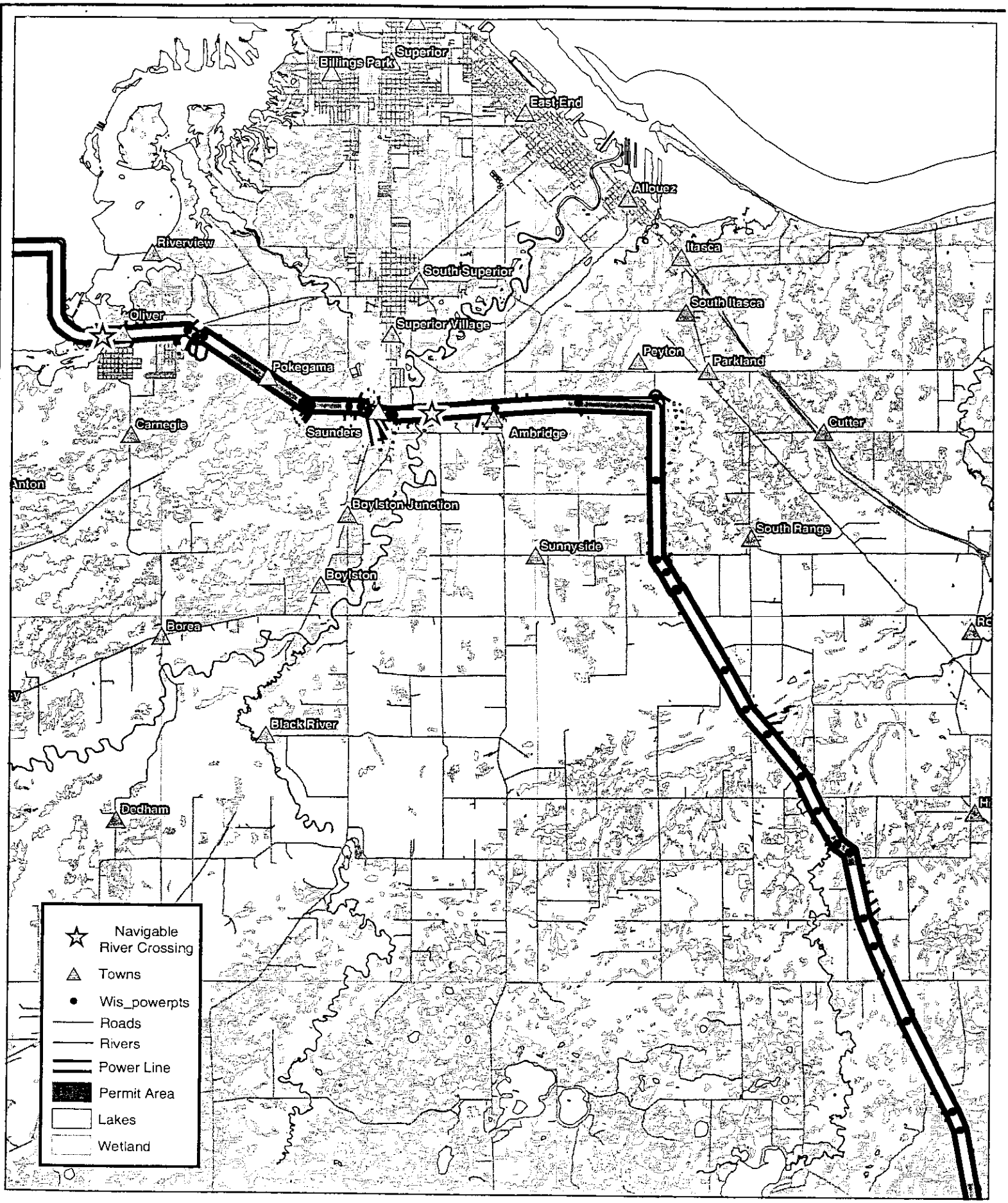

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Permit Areas

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Plate 1

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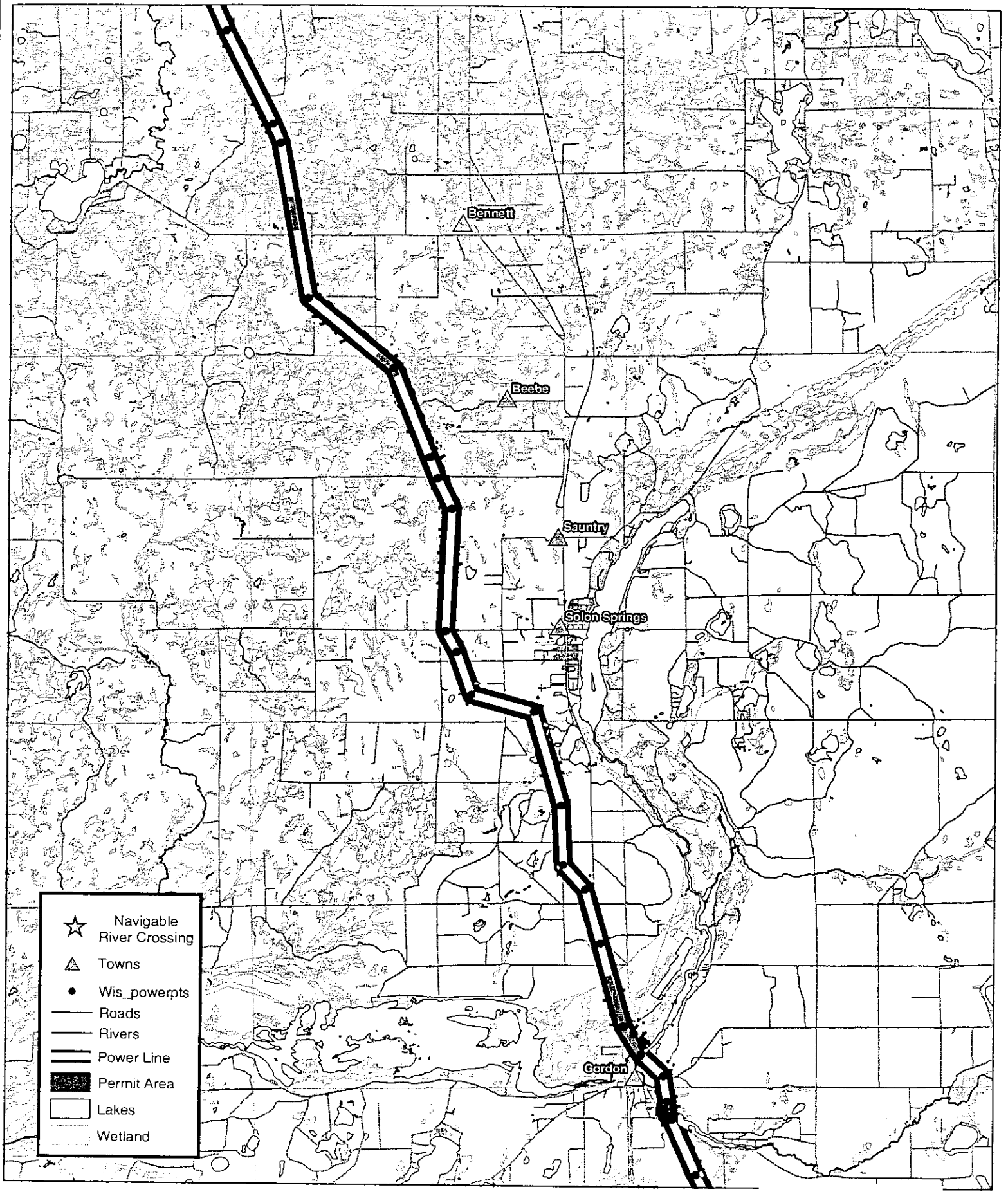

St. Paul District
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Permit Areas

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Plate 2

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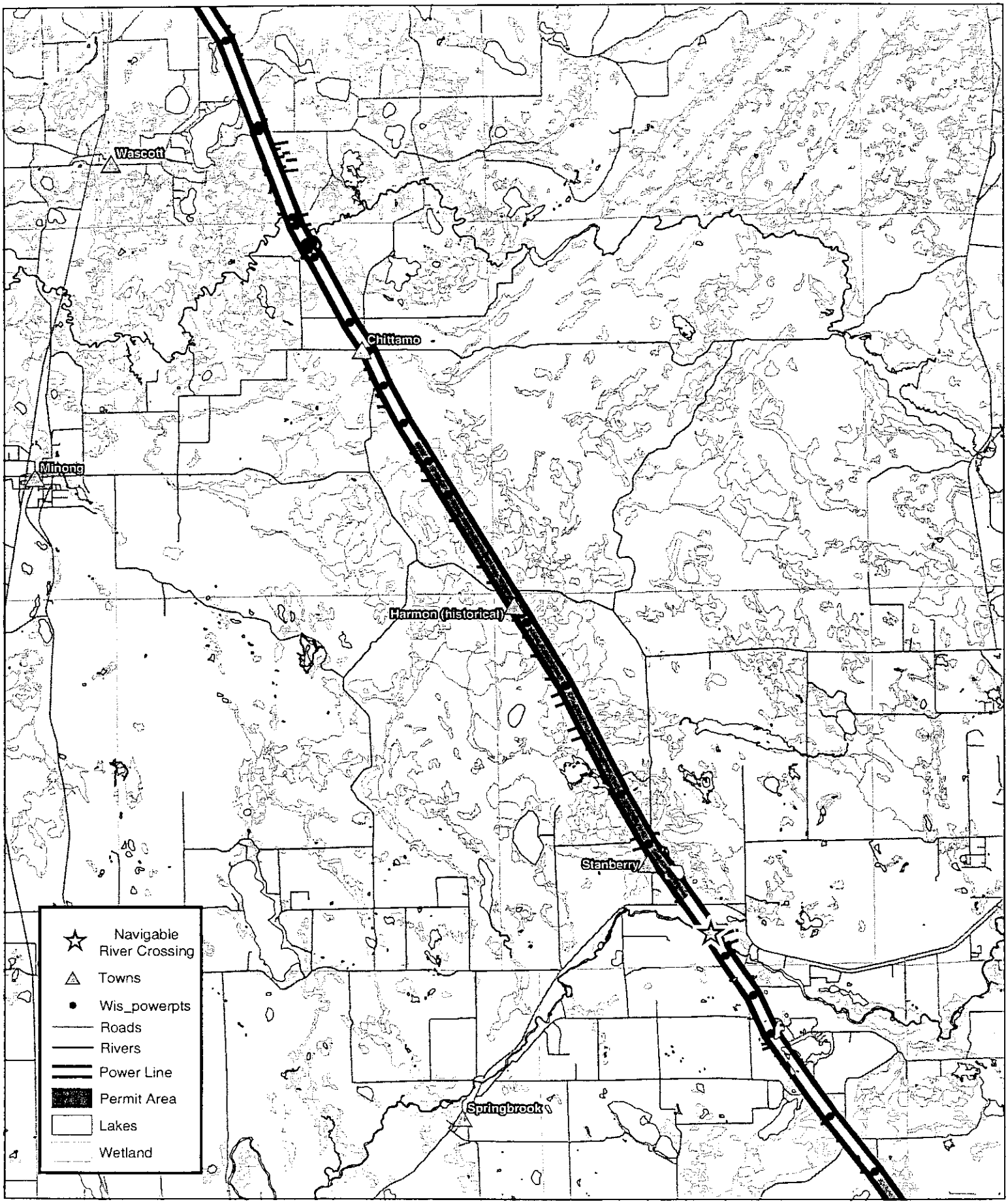

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Permit Areas

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Plate 3

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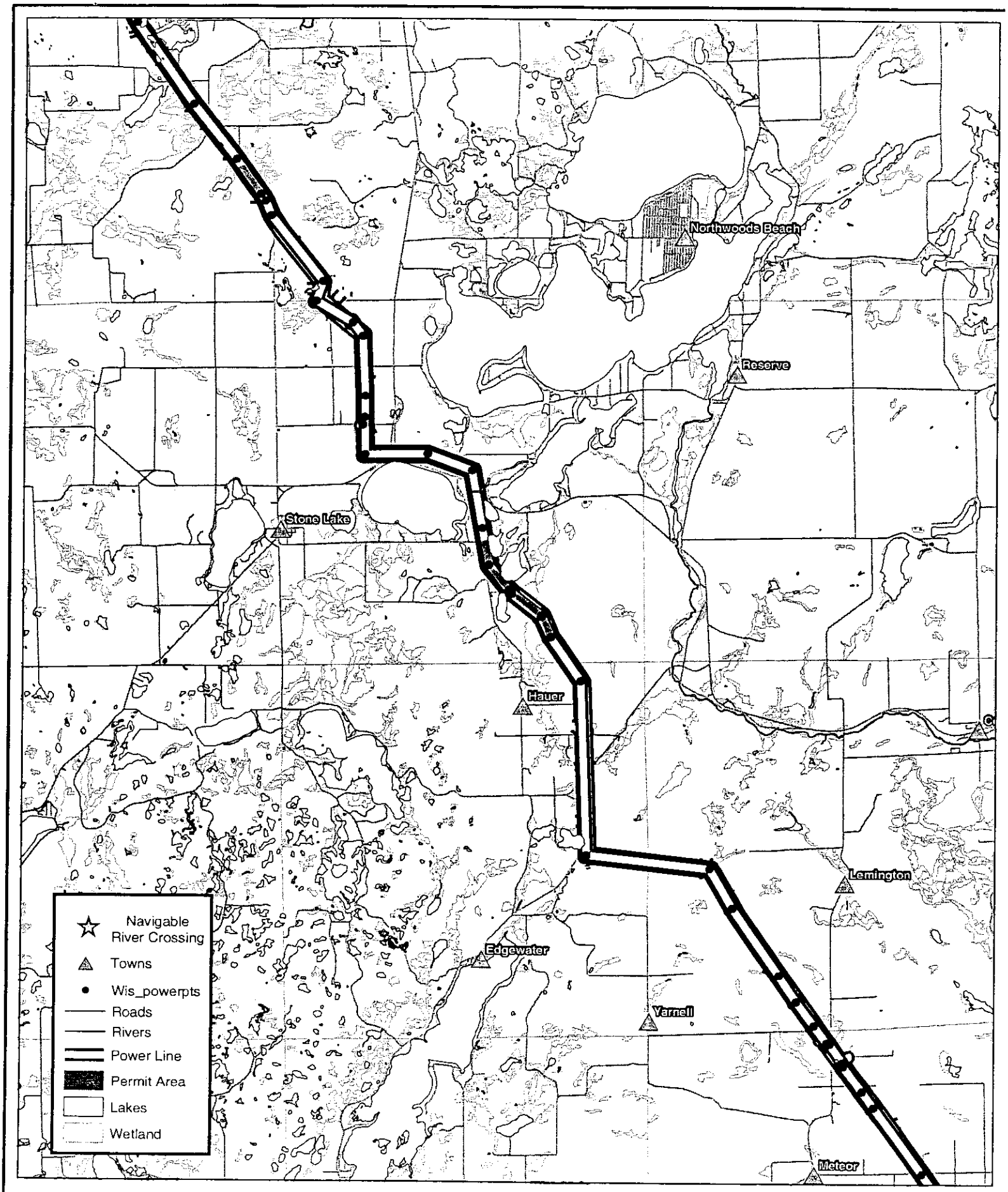

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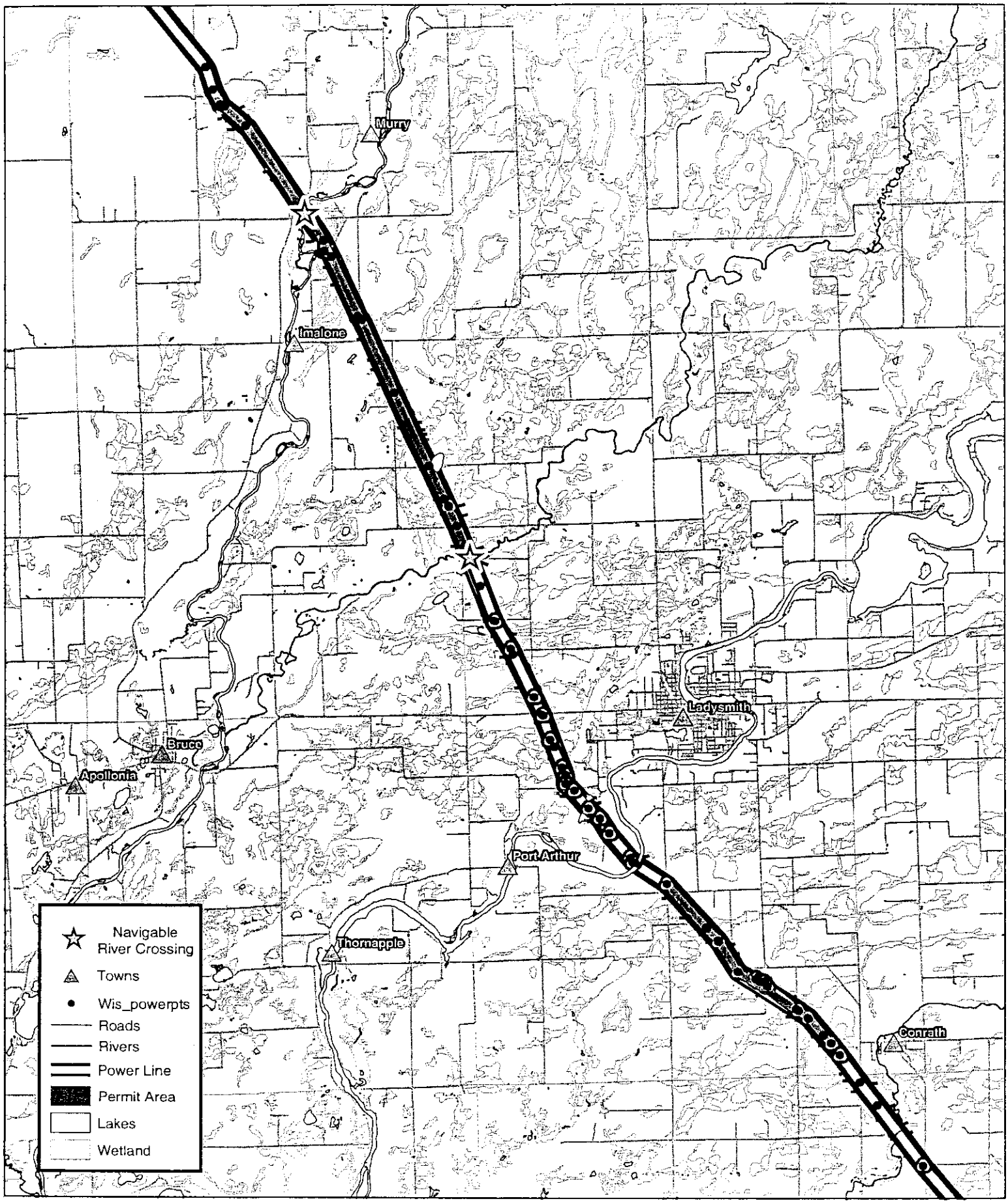
Plate 4



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Permit Areas

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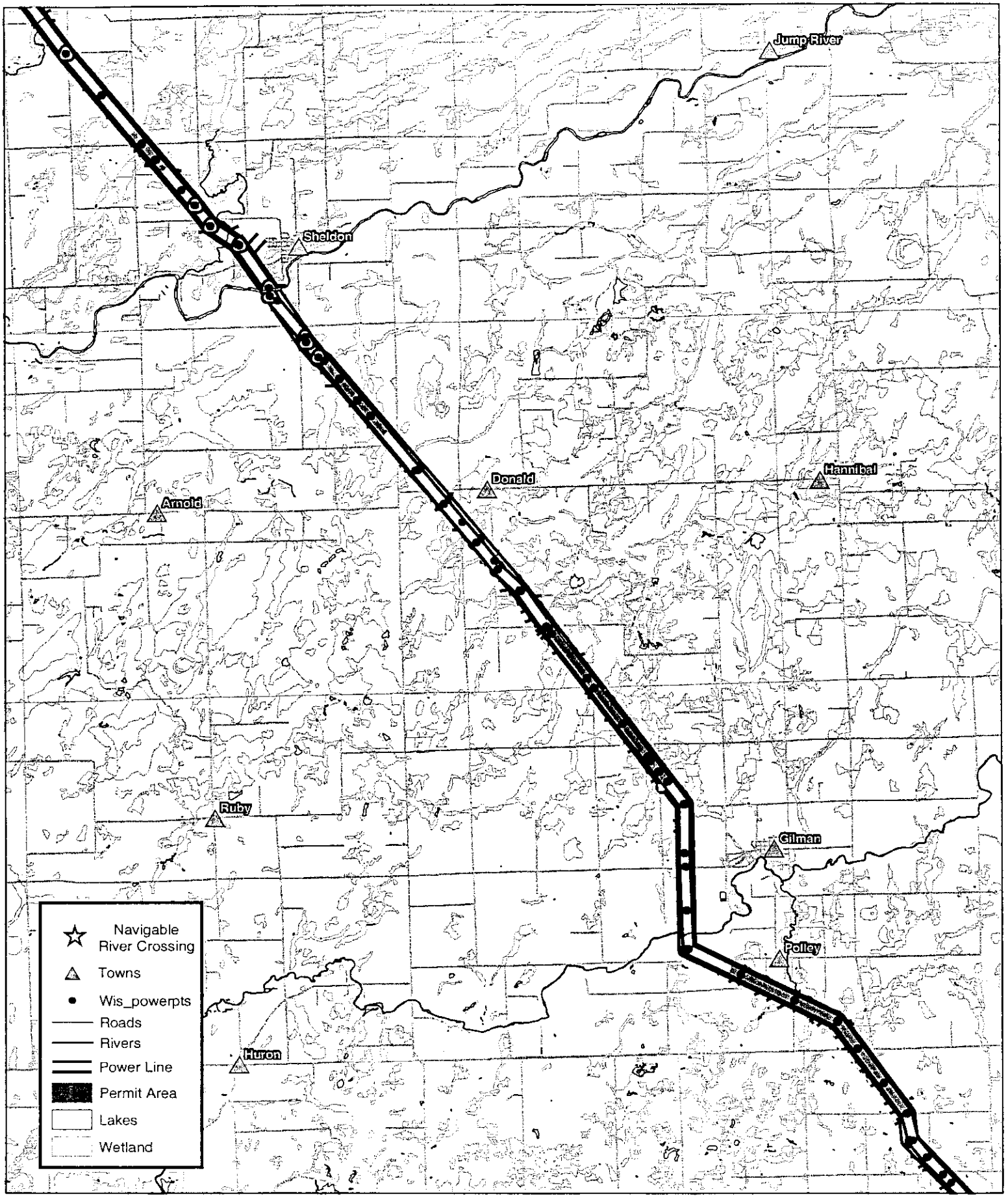

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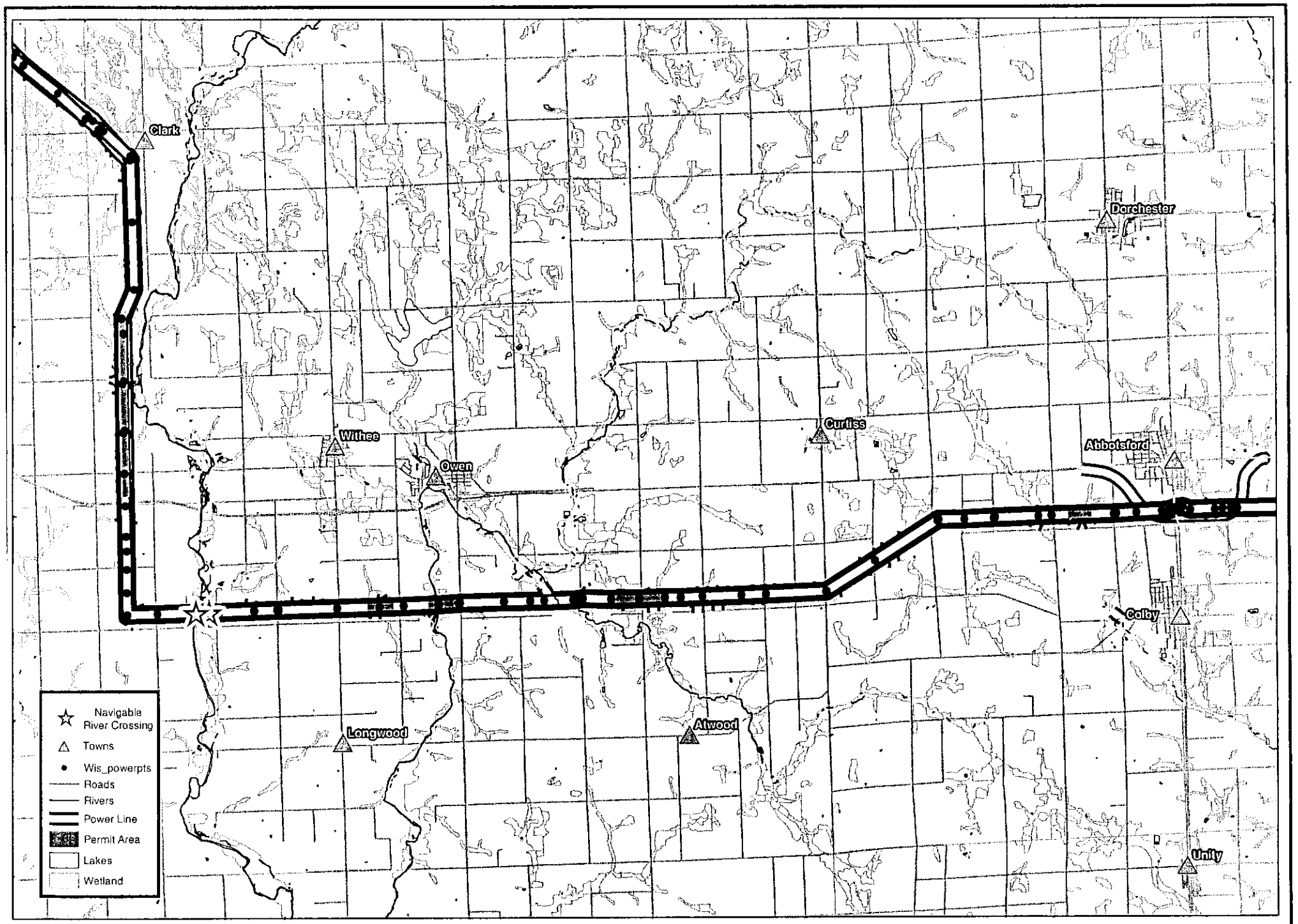
Plate 6



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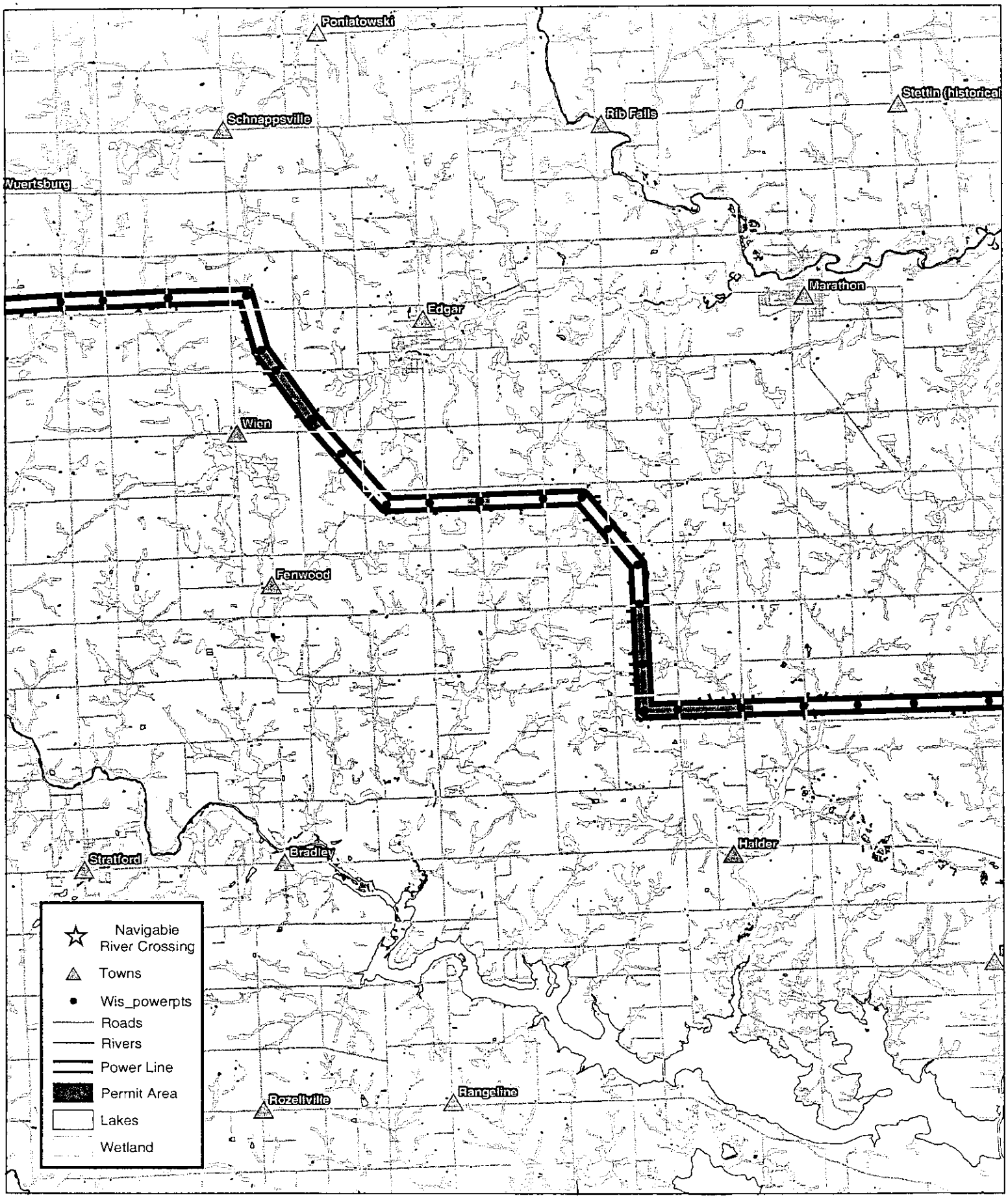
Permit Areas

Plate 7



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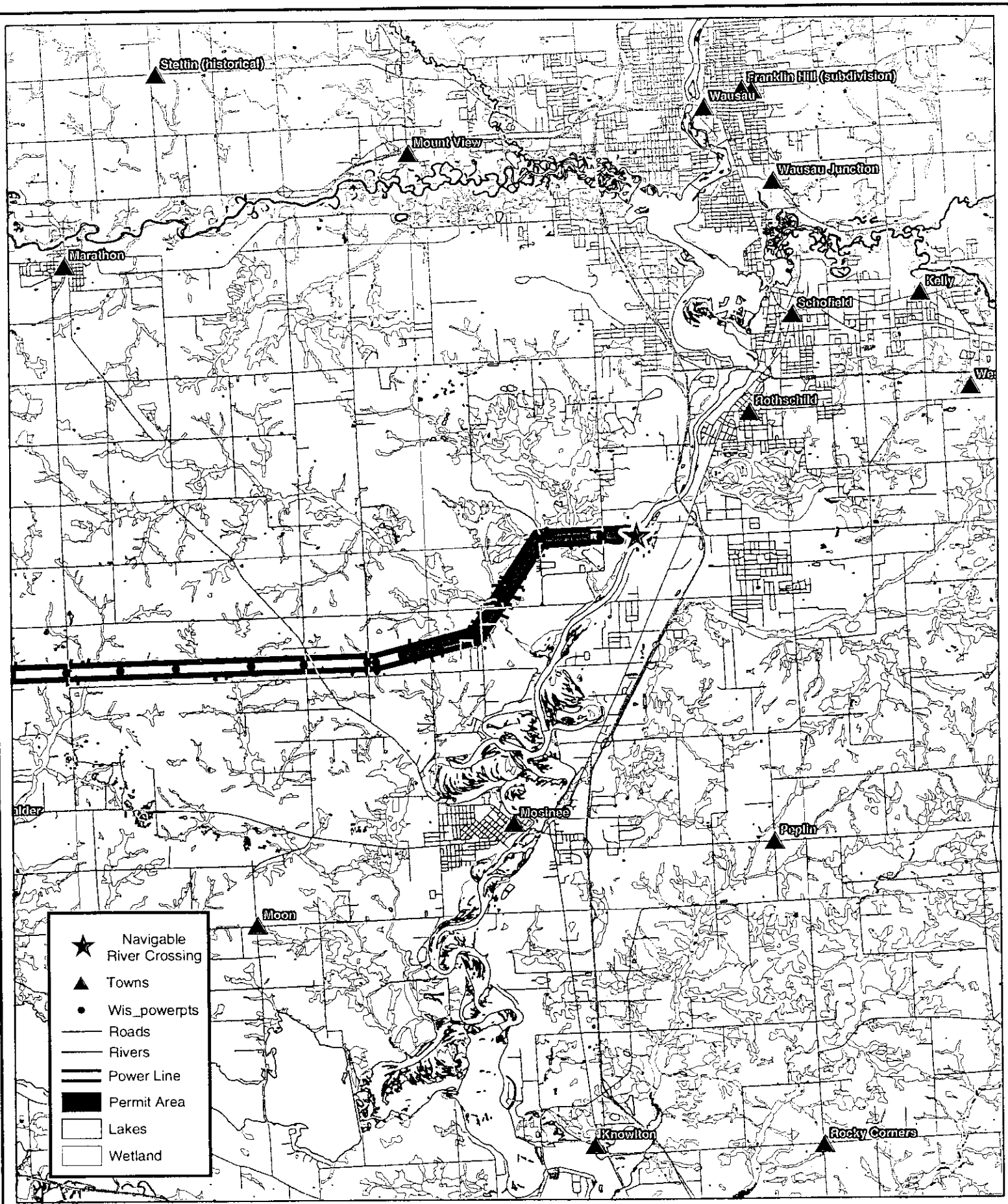

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Permit Areas

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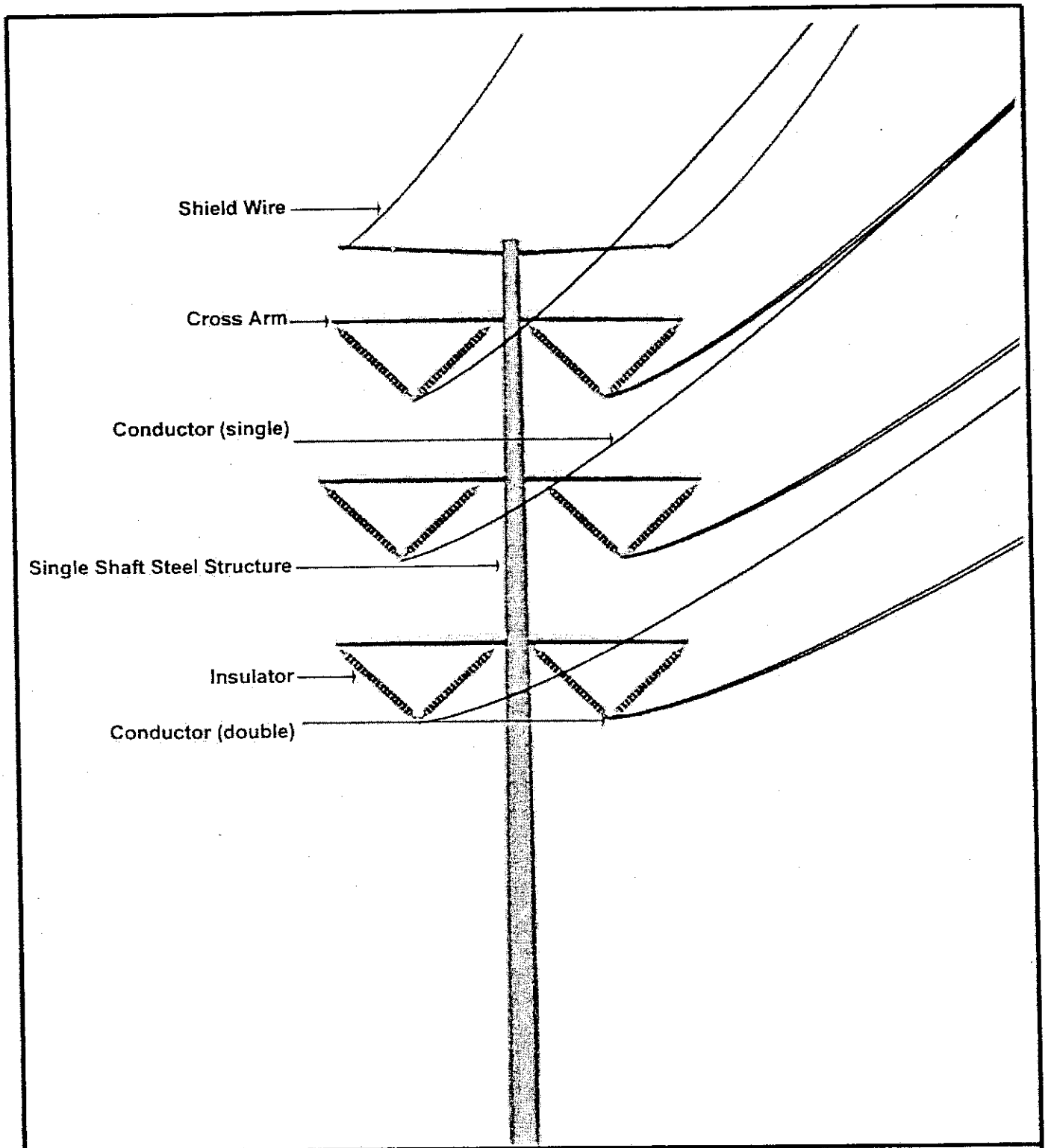
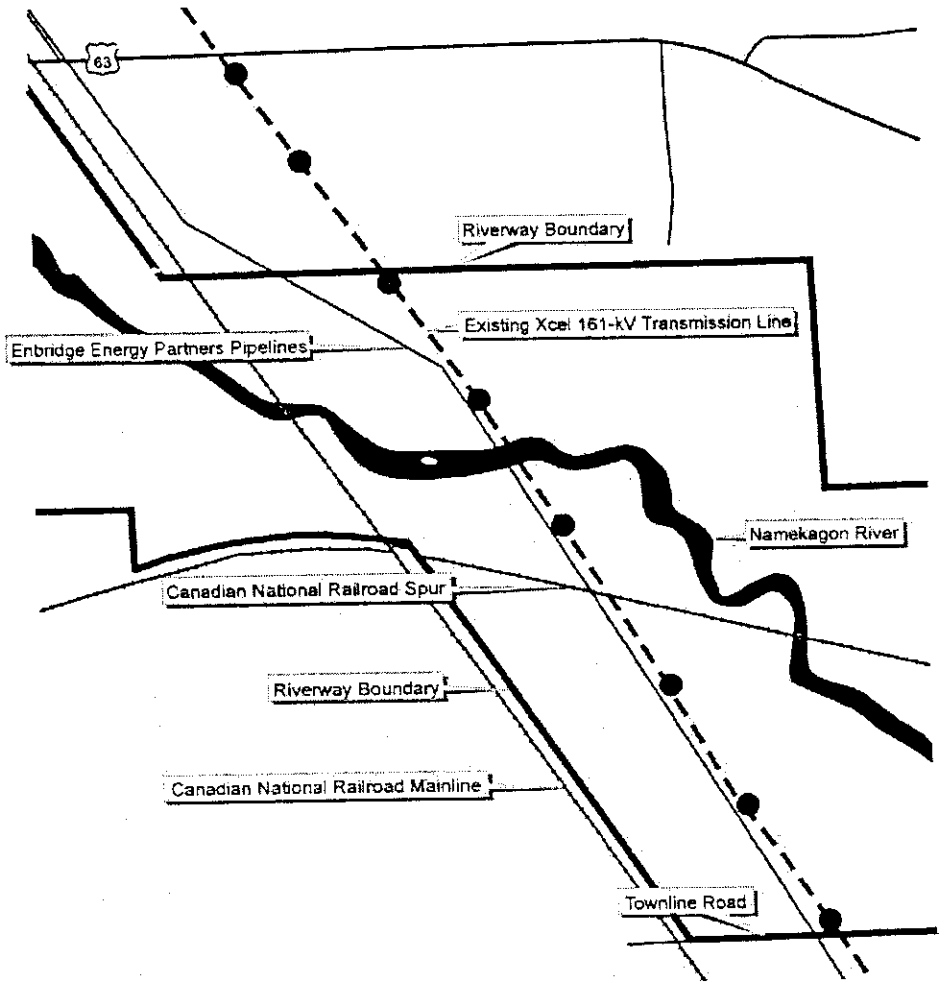


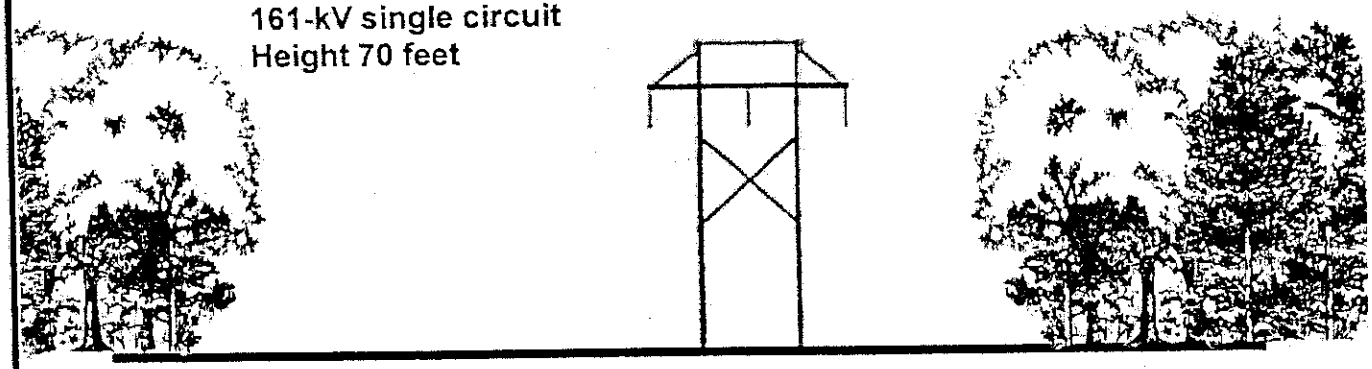
River Crossing/ROW Request

Figure 2.1-2

Anatomy of a Transmission Line



H-frame wooden structures
161-kV single circuit
Height 70 feet



Legend:

— — — — Existing transmission line alignments

● Existing structure locations

River Crossing/ROW Request

Figure 2.2-1

No Action Alternative
Overview and Structure Type

10/25/03