

Transcript of Crawford Stewardship Podcast episode 10: Rob Danielson, broadcast on WDRT 91.9 on 10/20/25.

This transcript was auto-generated and only lightly edited, it may contain errors. You can find the recording [here](#).

Host Joe Childs and co-host Amy Fenn talk with Rob Danielson regarding the 765kv transmission line proposed to cut across Crawford County.

Joe: Today we are talking about something you may have heard of, a transmission line coming through Crawford, Richland, and Vernon Counties, a 765,000 volt expansion transmission line and for that purpose, we are talking to Rob Danielson. Rob lives in the town of Stark, near LaFarge, Wisconsin, and the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. He began studying policy and decision making associated with high voltage expansion transmission lines in 2011, when serving on the town of Stark Energy Planning and Information Committee. That committee was responding to the Badger Cooley expansion Transmission line proposal. From 2012 to 2018, Rob participated in American transmission companies, or ATCs, annual planning exercises. During the Wisconsin Public Service Commission's Review of the Badger Cooley and Cardinal Hickory Transmission Line proposals, he worked with industry respected engineers and economists evaluating need and helping develop Wisconsin specific non-transmission alternatives. We will talk about need and alternatives in an upcoming podcast. Rob has worked with a number of organizations, including Save Our Unique Lands of Wisconsin, but today, he is representing his personal interests as a potentially impacted landowner in the town of Stark. Based on his energy research, Rob believes that rapidly soaring costs for grid power will eventually drive many customers into the distributed energy future, where modern efficiencies, solar and battery storage will significantly reduce demand for grid power over time. As this conversation pertains to land impacts, it will be helpful to access the maps on our podcast page. Enter the string of characters into your browser bit.ly/drtcsp to view the maps. If you have questions, please send them to contact@crowfordstewardship.org. So, Rob, first, I want to thank you for coming in today and sharing your expertise on this subject, so, if you want to introduce yourself a little bit and talk a little bit more, or we can dive straight into the questions.

Rob: Thank you very much, Joe and Amy. It's a pleasure to be here.

Joe: So, Rob, can you tell me what is a 765,000 or 765 KV expansion transmission line, and how does this class of transmission differentiate from the modest wooden pole transmission lines that have been in our area for many years?

Rob: That's right, Joe. We have two levels of electricity delivery in our current system. We have the wooden pole **transmission** structures that are about 70 feet high. They deliver power to about 20 substations in our area, and spreading out from each of those substations, we have much smaller **distribution** lines that run along roads and sometimes across private property. Our **transmission** lines are owned by Dairyland Power Cooperative, our **distribution** lines are owned by our cooperatives, like Vernon, Electric, Scenic Rivers, and Ridland Electric. A 700, I think I agree with you. It's called a 765KV transmission line and it is the largest line that's made. They use 10 times the voltage and can engage about 24 times more power than our existing transmission lines. For reference, a 765KV line might carry six times as much power as the very large 345KV transmission lines we see along our interstates. There has never been a transmission line of this magnitude proposed or built in Wisconsin, not to mention aimed at a sensitive area. One might get the impression that the 765 KV lines are hot new technology, but they're not. The ultra high voltage technology dates to the late 1960s. 765 KV lines are often installed in multiples. Some listeners may have seen these transmission lines crossing interstate I-55 in Central Illinois. The four legged structures use lattice construction instead of single pole construction. Lattice, or I crossed, steel members like you might see in the Eiffel Tower. At this point developers are discussing only one facility, but it is increasingly common for more infrastructure to follow established corridors. In terms of scale and landscape appearance, a 765,000 volt transmission line typically requires about 200 feet of clear cut area or easement compared to our existing 80 to 100 foot wide easements. Based on industry and developer descriptions, these towers can reach 200 feet or higher compared to the 70 foot heights of Dairyland's existing transmission lines in our area. Trees in the area, for example, are roughly about 70 feet high.

Joe: That sounds like it would differ widely from what we're normally used to seeing around here. These aren't, you know, you've never seen one in Wisconsin, if you're driving, even on the interstate. Those big transmission lines that we're talking about are bigger than that by a considerable margin. And the 200 foot wide easement should stick out a little bit as well. I mean, that's more land that private property owners end up having to clear cut and maintain, or not maintain, but they would lose access to it.

So 100 feet more land, which will often include forests and established habitats and stuff, so it really just tears a larger hole through the habitat. So, before we discuss the locations being considered, can you tell us a bit about the utilities who are proposing it? I've heard the acronym "MISO" used, and I don't understand what that is, but could you explain that?

Rob: The two utilities who have announced interest in building this transmission line are Dairyland Power Cooperative, and Next Era Transmission. You might also hear the company name Gridliance, which is a newly created subsidiary of NextEra. Dairyland's home office is in Lacrosse, Wisconsin. NextEra's home office is in Florida. So who is Dairyland Power Cooperative? Our electric cooperatives, Vernon Electric, Richland Electric, and Scenic Rivers, have strong business ties with Dairyland. They are **distribution** coop members in Dairyland's cooperative network, Vernon, Richland and Scenic Rivers buy most of the power that we use from Dairyland. However, there is an increasing amount of power that is being produced by solar members of the co ops, Vernon Electric, for example, is approaching about 10% member solar. So, yes, the dreaded term MISO. This is short for Mid-continent Independent System Operator. MISO is an organization of more than 100 utility interests that oversee the use of all of the transmission lines in the Midwest electricity market. Physically, the MISO market is a massive spider web of 750,000 miles of transmission lines. The utilities who were part of this spider web used the electricity market to mutually generate, sell, and buy power. There are five of these ISOs in the United States. The word 'independent' deserves some discussion. MISO is independent. It is not a creation of any state or of the federal government. MISO's transmission planning is independent. It is not required by any state or by the federal government. In fact, if one reads MISO's charter, one can see it is the transmission owners that added the role of voluntary transmission planning. In contrast, utility planning is guided by the states, by the energy laws they have, and they usually assign the planning tasks to their public utility commissions. Thus, when Dairyland Power Cooperative and NextEra Transmission describe the 765KV project as quote, "a larger effort by the region's electric grid operator," and claimed that it would "enhance regional grid reliability while addressing growing energy demand," they are speaking of the volunteer energy planning that MISO does. The utilities' prejudice for growth is in the name of the planning itself: Midwest Transmission **Expansion** Planning.

Amy: So, Rob, if I can make sure that I'm understanding this correctly, it sounds like you're describing a system where the companies that are selling us the electricity are also the ones designing and proposing ways for them to deliver it to us. It's not

necessarily a public agency making those decisions in the public good or proposals in the public good, but it's the salesmen that are proposing the selling methods.

Rob: That's right, and they don't really look at what customers want. They don't look at energy efficiency, distributed generation, it's not in their planning.

Amy: Got it.

Joe: So if it was truly in the interest, you know, if we're gonna spend a bunch of public dollars, to better our electricity transmission, or to ease up on our grid, make it more reliable, it seems as if there may be some other areas where that money could be spent, more on the user end than the provider end.

Rob: Yes, that's very much the case.

Joe: So we've seen some maps come out of where these transmission lines could possibly go. So what are some of the locations that Dairyland Power Cooperoperative and NextEra have said they're investigating? You know, they're not truly proposed yet, but where are some of the possible routes?

Rob: So, basically, Dairyland, here's Dairyland's statement. It says, in regard to potential routing, it says that a route has not been determined and that potential routes using existing transmission line corridors as much as possible are to be studied. This statement is consistent with two laws, that existing transmission lines must be considered the highest priority when siting a new transmission line, and that two routes must be included on any new transmission proposal made to the public Service Commission. At least two routes. So in this map, we see the existing transmission lines in our area highlighted in pink. I'm going to read some of the affected towns, villages and cities. In the top half of the map, potentially affected areas include the towns of Genoa, Harmony, Jefferson, Viroqua, Webster, Stark, Union, Forest, Hillsborough, and Greenwood, including the cities of Viroqua and Hillsboro, and the villages of Genoa, Avalanche, LaFarge, Viola, White City, Dilly, and Yuba. In the lower half of the map, we see the towns of Wheatland, Stirling, Freeman, Seneca, Haney, Utica, Liberty Pole, Clayton, Kickapoo, Sylvan, Forrest, Bloom, Union, Akron, Dayton, Marshall, Richland, Rockbridge, and Henrietta, including the city of Richland Center and the villages of Red Mound, Romance, Bud, Liberty Pole, Fargo, Purdy, Rising Sun, Ferryville, G's Mills,

Seneca, Petersburg, Mount Sterling, Soldier's Grove, Bell Center, Rolling Ground, Sugar Grove, Boas, Bown, Gem Town, and Bloom City.

Joe: That's a pretty extensive list, I think it might have even been faster to say the towns that aren't affected in the county if there are some. That's not something that is a small project list. We hear a lot on the electricity side about solar siting and stuff like that, which are still big impacts to the surrounding area, but impact a much smaller area. So something of this nature seems to impact quite a few people and quite a lot of land. We've got to take a little break here for a station identification. You are listening to the Crawford Stewardship Podcast on WDRT 91.9 FM. I am your host, Joseph Childs. Today we're sitting down with Rob Danielson and talking about an expansion transmission line proposal. If you would like some more information about this, you can find our website, CrawfordStewardship.org. You can also find these archival podcast episodes on WDRT.org or CrawfordStewardship.org. So, Rob, we've got [a map here](#) that shows the entire project, and on this map, it shows in the middle section here, there's a line that has just some question marks around it, and it seems to me as kind of an incomplete proposal or something where they're putting forward, like, we might come here, who knows, that sort of thing. So can you explain why that is an issue?

Rob: Yeah, that's a question that a lot of people have been asking. When Dairyland was posed this question, they said, "MISO has not yet determined which company would build and maintain this segment between Bell Center and Columbia County. Therefore, we do not have further information regarding the routes for those segments." Even if the utilities are secretly leaning towards a certain route, really no communities are off the hook because the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin will still require at least two possible routes in their proposal to the agency.

Joe: Can you elaborate on why the two possible routes? Is there a certain reason why they have to submit two?

Rob: Well, it's at least two. And basically it's so that the Commission can encourage the developer to look at different options and different communities will have different responses to what the options are. So it's in the interest of the public.

Joe: Okay, so what is the timetable for the general public, you know, landowners, local government, affected individuals? What's the timetable for them to really put together a response to this?

Rob: Dairyland has indicated that the developers will offer information meetings in the late fall, but there is no indication how extensive and useful this information will be. Dairyland has stated it has already begun working with potentially affected parties, but as of today, no landowners, local governments, state agencies, or tribes, are reporting that they have been contacted. So, based on Dairyland's statement that they will submit their application to the Public Service Commission in 2027, the time period allowed for landowners and other parties to receive materials detailing potential impacts on their properties, and to seek accommodations is almost one third of the time allotted for the Badger Coulee proposal. One response, in fact, to this situation is that landowners are saying, why should we wait? Let's contact Dairyland and ask them when they will provide us these materials that we need.

Joe: So you're saying there's a pretty shortened timeline on this, and since there's already lines there, you know, this information has probably been gathered. Why is it not being shared to the affected parties? At least, at the very least, the affected landowners are the people that already have the lines on their property.

Rob: Yeah, and the landowners want to basically look at the proposal in detail. There are options that can be taken. They may be opposed to the project, but it is not hypocritical to also look out for your own, to make sure that the powers that you have to influence the project on your property, at least are respected. So, yeah, that's the big thing. We have a lot of households, for example, that are literally right next to the existing transmission line because it did not seem to impose an issue at the time that the money was spent.

Joe: So, Rob, you named all the towns and villages and cities that would be affected by this, but how would I, as a landowner, know that I was going to be affected by this, and then what should I do? Say, you know, I'd use some common sense, I say, "Well, I've got a power line on my property already. Maybe this is one of the routes. How do I go about getting more information? And if I do, if this is the route that is going to come through my land, who would I even talk to if I wanted to voice my opinion about this?"

Rob: Well, you nailed it. If you have or know of an existing transmission line in your area, it is a likely target for routing this big transmission line. I think you just follow normal instincts. I would look at the maps. You can go to Google Maps and actually zoom in on the corridors and see the line coming through your area. And I would go to

my town board, and I would tell them that this is information that's important to you and perhaps other landowners. And basically, call up Dairyland, use their email address and ask them questions.

Joe: So you've obviously got a lot of experience dealing with these things. Did you study these? Are you professional in any sense of the word? Or were you once an affected landowner that took initiative and just went down this rabbit hole and started to research these things?

Rob: I was an affected landowner in 2010 for the Badger Coulee proposal, and that's why we formed the committee and I went to all of those utility planning meetings. I know, quite a bit about it from participating in two very lengthy proceedings before the PSC. Why did I do that? Well, I take my responsibility for land and impacts on land and in my opinion, if a project is not needed, it doesn't justify a single acre or inch of land being used improperly.

Joe: So, you were, you know, just a normal guy in 2009, and then 2010 comes along, and you just essentially said, you know what, this is something that I care about deeply, and I'm going to get involved. It doesn't take, you know, classical, professional training to get involved with something like this. So, you know, if you're a landowner out there that has a transmission line on your property, you don't need to go and seek out professionals in any sense of the word, you know, raising the question at your town board, researching online with some internet searches, can get you a lot of the way, and eventually introduce you into a network such as Rob's, where you can find folks that maybe they aren't professionals, but they've got a lot of experience on the subject.

Rob: Yeah, I think that, for example, there's a lot of existing questions that exist from the prior transmission line. The town governments responded by adopting over 50 information request resolutions. and they basically asked the kinds of questions that landowners would ask. They do ask questions about need. And this is stuff that people want to know answers to, and the town governments are in an excellent position to be able to ask those questions. And I believe, in fact, I know my town adopted a resolution, and there are several others who are looking at variations of that resolution right now.

Joe: So this is a two partter. So you're talking about resolutions that, to me, I don't know what that means. Like, adopting a resolution, it sounds like a long drawn out

process, but what is the process of adopting a resolution? And is this something where you said your town of Stark has adopted one? Is this something where myself, living in the village of Soldiers Grove, or my parents living in the town of Scott, could go to a town that has adopted a resolution and look at theirs and essentially, you know, switch out some things, the name of the town for starters, but also, if there's any very important specific things to that township, add those in. You know, this doesn't have to be reinventing a wheel, I would assume.

Rob: That's correct. Although towns do have unique things, like there's a very large Amish population in one of the towns, and they have a lot of questions pertaining to that. There's a town that has a little airport right next to where it's proposed, they have questions about that. But yes, it's the towns tend to network with each other. We have the Wisconsin Towns Association and the Vernon County Towns Association. So when one town does something, it's very easy for another town to find out what that is, and get those documents, and it's a fantastic educational tool, too, because the supervisors actually sit down and read about the proposals, the questions that exist about it, and people do get interested in this subject matter. They know that there's a lot of discussion going on about energy direction and policy today. A resolution is simply a problem, and then resolving the problem. It's made up of two parts. The town boards and villages use this mechanism all the time to solve a problem. Whereas we have this problem, therefore, this is the question we have for you.

Joe: And so that is a formal process, so is that different than, you know, I go to my town board and I talk to the town chairman, and he or she says, you know, I'll look into it. They send an email to Dairyland Power, and they get the answer. Is that sufficient to be a resolution, or is there something that needs to be officially put on the books that would say, "our township is formally requesting information from you" rather than "Hey, it's Joe. Can you tell me some more information about this in an email?"

Rob: That's right. It's an accountable written document that's approved by the majority of the supervisors on the town board, and it specifies that the answer should be in writing, or, in one case there's an option to be able to do it verbally, to answer the questions verbally, in the presentation. I believe the one that Stark adopted said, do that by December 31st of this year.

Joe: So when I hear about this, if I was an affected landowner that just hearing about this, obviously there's going to be a lot of emotion. And my first inclination, and maybe

this is a personal thing, but I'm sure others will like me, is probably to write a pretty mean letter or an email to Dairyland Power and then say, "All right, I've voiced my opinion, I'm done," but to me, these resolutions may be a more effective route. Can you elaborate on how these resolutions are the effective route?

Rob: So, I think fundamentally, that what landowners are looking for is accountability, right? And the way to get accountability is not really to fingerpoint and name and get emotional about the person that's, you know, proposing something. The way to get accountability is to learn as much as you can about it and to figure out what questions you have about it. Everything that affects us emotionally is coming from, you know, a real situation, or that would not be coming out of us. So the technique that is really important, I think to keep in mind is ask questions. They know when you write as a landowner the position that you're in, you don't have to describe that. What they don't know is what information, should they be providing you to make you more content with the situation? So I just say, "Hey, it's all about asking questions and whether you're a town board or an individual, it's the same mechanism."

Joe: See, I like how you put that. They know that you're not going to be happy about this as a landowner and responding in the way of like, "I just I hate this, I'm so mad," isn't really effective, but you can turn those feelings of, there's a reason why you're frustrated, maybe you really take pride in you've got a hickory stand that goes right up to the existing easement, and they're gonna wipe all those out. Well pose the frustration as a question, instead of, "I hate you, this is a bad project, I don't want it," pose it as "well, what are you going to do to compensate me for the fact that you're doing this to my trees," or "what are you going to do to compensate that you're going to, you know, ruin pasture that I have my cattle in," like, turn those frustrations and emotions and feelings into questions, put them on a formal document, and ask for them to be answered, and if the answers aren't satisfactory, there could be some steps taken to mitigate the project or to institute some conditions into the project, so...

Rob: Yeah, there's a difference between data and, you know, like, saying things. Like, if you say, "Oh, I've got this area that I'm trying to develop for pasture, and you can't really come through here, and that's all you say, then they're gonna say, "Well, of course, we're not going to go through your pasture. We'll work with you. We'll do something." But if you said, "I need a map of where it would actually go on my land, where you think the additional corridor would be, so that I can really look at it in a relationship to my land."

Joe: I really appreciate you coming in today, Rob. We've got to cut it short a little bit, and this is a big project, and this is gonna go much farther than just one episode. But I really liked how you laid out what the project is, how you can get involved, and the best and maybe most efficient route to get involved as well. So I'm sure this conversation will continue, but thank you very much for coming in today.

Rob: My pleasure, Joe and Amy.

Joe: You have been listening to the Crawford Stewardship podcast. I'm your host, Joseph Childs, and today we sat down with Rob Danielson to speak about the proposed 765 kv transmission line that would run through Crawford, Vernon, and Richland Counties. If you want more information on this, you can go to CrawfordStewardship.org to check out the map that we referenced today for more podcast episodes, you can go to WDRT.org. You have been listening to WDRT 919 FM and thank you and have a good day.