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State judge approves power line project

By RYAN STOTTS | Lee Newspapers

The power line project known as CapX2020 has a judge's blessing.

Minnesota Administrative Law Judge Beverly J. Heydinger recommended Friday the \$2 billion project be approved. "We put together a very strong case for the need for the project, and that's reflected in her decision," said CapX2020 spokesman Tim Carlsgaard.

The 345-kilovolt power lines would cross the Mississippi River at one of three cities — Winona, Alma, Wis., or La Crescent, Minn. — and then to substations in La Crosse or Holmen.

The route will not be determined until late 2010, Carlsgaard said.

Two additional 345-kilovolt lines into the Twin Cities, one from Fargo, N.D. and one from Brookings, S.D., and a third 230-kilovolt line from Bemidji, Minn., to Grand Rapids, Minn., are included in the project.

Attorney Paula Maccabee, who represented the Citizens Energy Task Force opposed to the project, said the decision indicates the regulatory system is "broken."

"CapX2020 didn't have to prove that these power lines are the best alternative, or that they would carry wind energy rather than dirty coal," Maccabee said.

"The burden of the proof to show alternatives was placed on basically unfunded, grassroots citizens," she said.