

FROZEN WALK CELEBRATES NATURE, QUESTIONS CAPX2020

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If you stargaze from Aghaming Park and Preserve, you can see Orion and Pleiades above the Minnesota bluffs, then Triangulum and Aries farther west. Suddenly you're viewing the Zodiac, the sun's path—and an ancient Lakota story, a constellation named for red osier dogwood, which grows in Winona's river-bottoms.

We'll visit red osier bushes and secret haunts of wildlife during the fifth annual Frozen River Walk, Saturday 1-2:30 p.m., offered free by Mississippi River Revival. Though we won't view constellations, we'll walk one $\frac{1}{2}$ mile roundtrip, celebrating nature. Please, wear winter boots, warm clothing. Bring kids, binoculars, cookies to share.

We'll visit wildlife niches destined to wake soon—crows' nests, warbler holes, turtle logs, Cuckoo Slough, signs of fox, beaver, mink. We'll reflect on red osier. Every year the Lakota smoke its inner bark as tobacco, honoring the red osier constellation during the end of winter, says Ronald Goodman in *Lakota Star Knowledge*.

This is the part I love. The sky myth connects to real wisdom on Earth. As the sun travels the sky the first morning of spring, the Big Dipper carries a coal and lights a sacred pipe (the red osier constellation), says Goodman. The fire of life gets renewed. The Lakota stop harvesting red osier. They leave it alone, allowing new life to grow.

We'll walk the frog-hunting grounds of red-shouldered hawks, a species benefiting from red osier wisdom. Red-shoulders have declined about 90% since European settlement. They nest nearly exclusively in floodplain forests. A few years ago, motorized vehicles tore through Aghaming's wetland woods every season, crushing vegetation, sometimes evicting red-shoulders. Now barriers go up March 1. The city of Winona controls traffic while red-shoulders regenerate.

We'll walk to an 80-foot power pole which also evokes red osier wisdom. A few decades ago, DDT nearly exterminated ospreys, virtually eliminating the river's population. The U.S. banned DDT. Ospreys resumed breeding on the river, and this pole supported their first nest back at Aghaming.

We'll envision new power towers proposed by CAPX2020, the Hampton-Rochester-La Crosse route. We'll consider Minnesota Environmental Impact Statement for the route, especially the proposed power line crossing from Kellogg to Alma. The Frozen Walk will keep moving, seeking wildlife's secrets. But Minnesotans should know the Minnesota EIS endangers the

Mississippi River Migration Corridor, failing a comprehensive knowledge of birdlife.

Though 40% of the continent's waterfowl use the flyway, the EIS recommends towers 199 feet tall and three towering bands of lines stretched across airspace used by ducks and swans when fleeing from hunters to hunt-free habitat, e.g. Weaver Bottoms, Rieck's Lake, Big Lake.

In one section the EIS claims the Mississippi Flyway "passes over" the CAPX2020 crossing. In another it claims to mitigate impact by spanning lines *above* habitat, ignoring airspace as part of migratory habitat. It also assumes the narrowest crossing safest for birds, ignoring that the landscape creates a bottleneck which may concentrate bird collisions with towers and lines.

The EIS claims "the effect of transmission lines on avian species are negligible beyond one mile." But the lines will carry coal-generated electricity, increasing global warming that dries up wetlands in Alaska and the Yukon, used as breeding grounds by river migrants such as lesser scaup and rusty blackbirds.

The EIS relies upon a 1994 citation of the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee. Subsequent APLIC citations and USFWS power line guidelines exclude the one-mile suggestion. A 2008 study by California Energy Commission says, "Researchers do not know how far birds will fall from a power line following a collision."

We'll gaze up at bird flight diverters on wires, which the EIS claims mitigates collisions. The CEC study has doubts. "Collisions with transmission and distribution lines remains poorly understood," it says. "Behavioral reactions to power line diverters are relatively unknown for most species, and may not be consistent between species."

Forest Service reports estimate power-line collisions kill 130-175 million birds per year in the U.S., perhaps millions more. The EIS doesn't reference the reports. It claims the impact on the flyway's avian species "are not anticipated to be significant at a population level." It looks for species of concern at the Kellogg-Alma crossing and doesn't even find American white pelicans.

CAPX2020 and its Minnesota's EIS lack red osier wisdom. They classify species and habitats, relating to wildlife as bureaucratic acronyms inside electronic files, creating a shell game of engineering options that under-emphasizes that dams, unnatural flow, pollution and exotic species already marginalize the flyway so much that the river no longer creates its own islands. Real breathing birds need better habitat, not new-gigantic obstructions in the middle of a corridor used by 300 species.

If you love nature, give the grid a break. Walk the Red Osier Trail Saturday.

Richie Swanson works sometimes for Mississippi River Revival. His narrative of Aghaming's nature, River Bird Blog, has new photographs at www.RichieSwanson.com.