

August 24, 2018

ELECTRONIC FILING

Daniel P. Wolf, Executive Secretary Minnesota Public Utilities Commission 127 7th Place East, Suite 350 St. Paul, MN 55101-2147

RE: Petition for Rulemaking

Commission Docket No. E999/R-18-518

Dear Mr. Wolf:

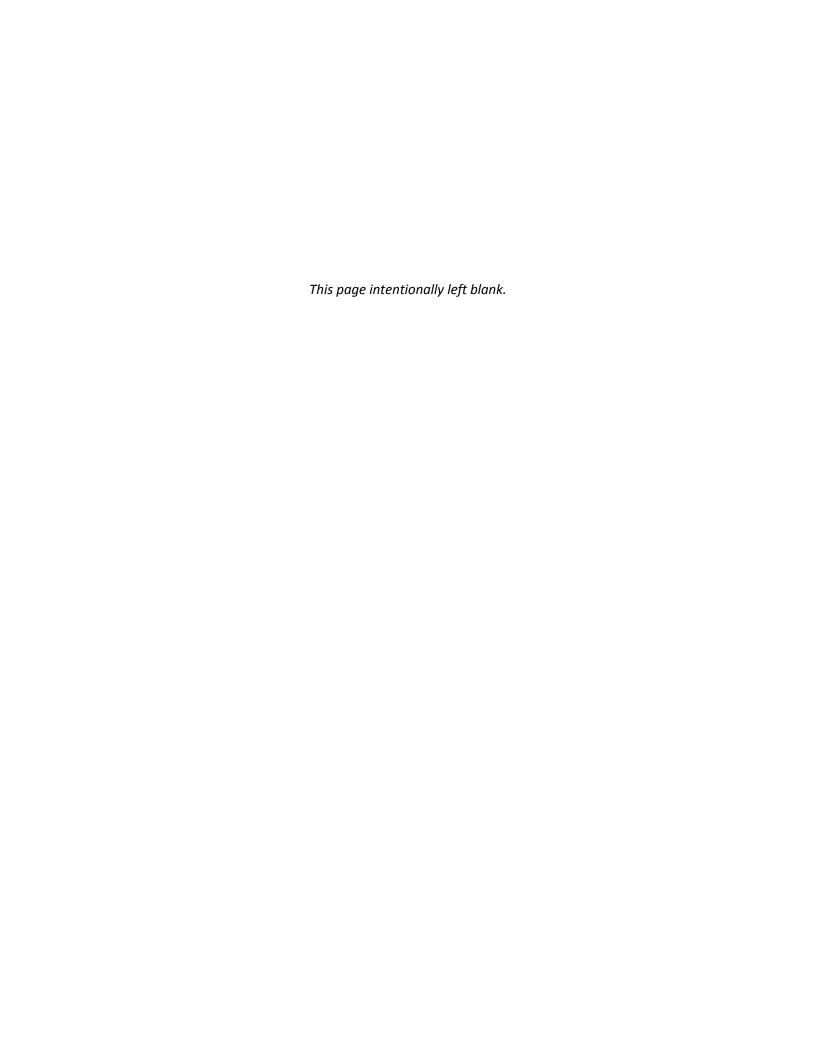
In the Matter of the Goodhue Wind Truth Petition for Rulemaking for Wind Turbine Siting Standards, Minn. R. Ch. 7854

Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) staff provides the attached comments and recommendations in the above matter that address the advisability of initiating LWECS rulemaking at this time, and responding to Petitioner's assertions on the current Minn. Rule 7854.

We are available to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

John Wachtler, Energy Program Director David Birkholz, Environmental Review Manager





BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

ENERGY ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND ANALYSIS COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PUC Docket No. E999/R-18-518

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In the Matter of the Goodhue Wind Truth Petition for Rulemaking for Wind Turbine Siting Standards, Minn. R. Ch. 7854

Issues Addressed: These comments and recommendations address:

- Whether the Commission should initiate a rulemaking on LWECS siting standards;
- 2. while raising related issues and concerns; and
- 3. supporting establishment of an Advisory Committee to advise the Commission on the contents of possible rules, if rulemaking occurs.

Attachments: None

Additional documents: http://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/search.jsp (Year 18, Number 518).

This document can be made available in alternative formats, that is, large print or audio, by calling (651) 539-1530 (voice).

Introduction and Background

On July 30, Goodhue Wind Truth (GWT), through Ms. Carol Overland, filed a Petition for Rulemaking¹ for Minn. Rule 7854 for siting Large Wind Energy Conversion Systems (LWECS).

Although wind siting rules exist,² GWT suggests, "That rulemaking has not occurred." This position presumably arises from GWT's assertions that, "There is no siting criteria within these rules, and no requirement of environmental review."

¹ Petition for Rulemaking (Petition), Goodhue Wind Truth, July 30, 2018, eDocket no. <u>20187-145383-01</u>

² CHAPTER 7854, SITE PERMIT; LARGE WIND ENERGY SYSTEM

³ Petition (cover letter) at 2

⁴ Petition at 2

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) responded by issuing a comment period⁵ prior to making a determination and reply on the disposition of the request as per Minn. Statute 14.09.⁶ Specifically, the Commission requested comments on whether the petition meets the content requirements as set out in Minn. R. 1400.2040, Subp. 1; if the Commission should initiate a rulemaking on siting standards for LWECS; if the Commission initiates a rulemaking, should it establish an Advisory Committee to advise it on the contents of possible rules; and if there are related issues or concerns?

EERA Responses Concerning the Petition

There are two specific concerns raised in the current petition; 1) the Petitioner's opinion that the siting criteria in the current rule are inadequate; and 2) the Petitioner's interpretation that there is no environmental review requirement in the rule. It is EERA's view that the Petitioner's opinion misrepresents the state's permit review and environmental review of LWECS under the existing rule.

Siting Criteria

The legislative directive on siting to "site LWECS in an orderly manner compatible with environmental preservation, sustainable development, and the efficient use of resources" is a broad criterion, and serves the process well. However, as the Petitioner points out, the siting criteria in the Power Plant Siting Act also apply. EERA agrees with the Petitioner that the criteria of Minn. Statute 216E.03, Subd. 78 need to be considered in LWECS siting. In recent applications, these criteria have been specifically addressed in the Findings of Fact as part of the record that goes before the Commission for decision.

However, the Petitioner also addresses the need for more specific guidelines and standards established by the Commission by rule. EERA does not agree that current standards for permit conditions should be included as criteria in the rule itself. Again, the purpose of any criterion is to fulfill the legislative directive; and it is appropriate to have requirements that an individual application must include in order to meet the requirements to receive a permit. EERA does not however agree that the rule needs to codify current permit conditions. We believe the Commission continues to need the latitude to evaluate and evolve these permit conditions and standards as further information becomes available and the effectiveness of any given permit condition is tested.

Finally, Minn. Statute 216F.02 refers back to Minn. Statutes 216E (the Power Plant Siting Act) in several instances. Therefore, it may be premature to commence LWECS rulemaking until the Commission updates the Power Plant Siting Act rules.

Environmental Review

Energy facilities review has always been unique, given the varied nature of the different facilities and the legislative time restraints on conducting the processes. That is one reason why the Environmental Quality Board (EQB), who had initial responsibility for review of these applications, authorized alternative environmental review for wind energy projects under their Environmental Review rules.⁹

⁵ Notice of Comment Period, Commission, August 2, 2018, eDocket no. <u>20188-145500-01</u>; Extension, August 14, 2018, eDocket no. 20188-145500-01

⁶ 14.09 PETITION FOR ADOPTION OF RULE

⁷ 216F.03 SITING OF LWECS

⁸ 216E.03 DESIGNATING SITES AND ROUTES

⁹ 4410.3600 ALTERNATIVE REVIEW

The EQB approved environmental review for LWECS as an alternative form of environmental review when it approved the wind rules in 2002. ¹⁰ Minn. Rule 7854.0500, subp. 7 requires the permit application to include an analysis of the potential impacts of the project, proposed mitigative measures, and any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided, including a list of extensive analysis categories. It is true that it is unusual that the rule does not require a separate environmental document. However, that doesn't mean a complete environmental review is not performed.

EERA works with LWECS applicants well before an application is submitted to make sure all necessary studies and surveys are performed. These include economic and environmental issues, as well as modeling for noise and shadow flicker. The applicants also work with the Department of Natural Resources on bird and bat issues and potential impacts to sensitive resources. It is also part of the EERA guidance that applicants work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and perform Tier I (site characteristics) and Tier II and III studies that are indicated by Tier I review. In the end, though the environmental review is part of the applicants' filings, the potential impacts and mitigations are thoroughly vetted by EERA and the Commission. Finally, environmental review should include an opportunity for the public to participate in the agency decision-making, and the current wind rules do require public participation in the form of meetings and hearings. ¹¹

EERA therefore strongly disagrees with GWT's description of the process as having "no requirement of environmental review." As envisioned by the EQB, and as executed by the Commission and EERA, LWECS permit review includes robust environmental review.

EERA Staff Recommendations

EERA makes the following recommendations in response to the Petition for Rulemaking:

- 1. As the requirements for petitioning to amend rules¹² in Minn. Rule 1400.2040, subp. 1 are straightforward and concise, EERA believes the GWT Petition fulfills the content requirements for filing.
- 2. While there may be benefit in refining criteria specific to LWECS siting, EERA would caution against using rulemaking to establish specific permit conditions and standards that may need to be regularly evaluated and potentially revised.
- 3. If rulemaking is initiated, EERA does not think it is appropriate to alter the environmental review content of the existing rule.
- 4. Should rulemaking commence, EERA advises that if the Commission establishes an Advisory Committee it should be given clear goals for any amendments. The committee should comprise developers, utilities, affected agencies and select interested parties.

In the end, EERA questions whether it is the most efficient time for LWECS rulemaking while the Commission is still in the process of developing revisions to the Power Plant Siting Act rules.

¹⁰ 7854.0500 SITE PERMIT APPLICATION CONTENTS

¹¹ 7854.0900 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

^{12 1400.2040} PETITION FOR RULEMAKING

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Sharon Ferguson, hereby certify that I have this day, served copies of the following document on the attached list of persons by electronic filing, certified mail, e-mail, or by depositing a true and correct copy thereof properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States Mail at St. Paul, Minnesota.

Minnesota Department of Commerce Comments & Recommendations

Docket No. E999/R-18-518

Dated this 24th day of August 2018

/s/Sharon Ferguson

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Waseca Electric Utility ATTN Finance Dept. 508 South State Street Waseca MN 56093

U11103

Wild Rice Electric Coop. S. J. Haaven Mgr. PO Box 438

Mahnomen MN 56557

U11110

Winthrop Municipal Electric Plant Jenny Hazelton City Administrator

305 North Main Street

PO Box Y

Winthrop MN 55396

U11011

Thief River Falls Water & Light Dept.

Dale Narlock Director 123 Main Avenue North

PO Box 528

Thief River Falls MN 56701

U11019

Tri-County Electric Cooperative Brian Krambeer President, CEO

210 West Jessie Street

PO Box 626

Rushford MN 55971-0626

U11024

Tyler Munic. Light & Power Dept.

Barb Powell City Clerk

PO Box 398

Tyler MN 56178

U11081

Warren Light & Power Dept. - Electric Shannon Mortenson City Administrator

120 E. Bridge Ave. Warren MN 56762

U11086

Wells Public Utilities Commission

Jeff Amy Superintendent

101 1st St SE PO Box 96

Wells MN 56097-0096

Willmar Munic, Utilities Comm.

Wesley K Hompe General Manager

PO Box 937

700 Litchfield Ave SW

Willmar MN 56201

U11117

Worthington Public Utilities

Scott Hain General Manager 318 Ninth St.

PO Box 458

Worthington MN 56187