

EERA SUMMARY

Department of Commerce Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) conducts environmental review on behalf of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) for energy facility permit applications submitted under the Power Plant Siting Act (PPSA).¹ EERA performs the same tasks for projects being reviewed under the Large Wind Energy Conversion System (LWECS) siting statute² and the Pipeline siting statute.³

EERA also provides technical assistance to the Commission to aid in permitting these facilities and conducts compliance reviews of pre-construction, pre-operation and in-service projects. See the attached “**2019 Project Status**” report for a record of permitting projects reviewed in the last year.

EERA/MDA REVIEW OF SOLAR/AGRICULTURE

Solar energy generation is an important component of Minnesota’s renewable energy portfolio, and its importance is likely to increase as non-renewable energy sources are phased out. However, the relatively large physical footprint of solar facilities means that their development is more likely to raise concerns about conversion and adverse impacts to farmland, forest land, and natural lands.

In siting solar facilities, the Commission must consider the prime farmland exclusion rule contained in the Power Plant Siting Act. The prime farmland exclusion rule prohibits siting power plants on prime farmland where the site includes a half acre per megawatt of net generating capacity, unless “there is no feasible and prudent alternative.”⁴

Subsequently, the Commission charged both EERA and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to convene a work group as a first step to develop information and identify the interests and priorities of a wide group of stakeholders on this issue.

During the summer of 2019, Management Analysis and Development (MAD), at the request of MDA and EERA, conducted a survey and convened two facilitated workshops with a workgroup of persons representing organizations with a stake in the siting process. The purpose of the meetings was to examine the issues, priorities and preferences of the stakeholders regarding the siting of large-scale solar facilities in agricultural landscapes and identify areas of potential agreement and compromise between varying perspectives. MAD has since prepared a report summarizing that stakeholder input. EERA/MDA will be releasing that report along with an EERA/MDA paper documenting guidelines for developers in evaluating prudent and feasible alternatives, and considering offsetting benefits.

¹ Minnesota Statute [216E](#)

² Minnesota Statute [216F](#)

³ Minnesota Statute [216G](#)

⁴ Minnesota Rule [7850.4400](#), Subp. 4

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Permits Issued in 2019

TRANSMISSION LINES & GENERATION FACILITIES PERMITTED (MS 216E)

- Blazing Star 2 115 kV Wind Project HVTL (TL-17-701)
- Huntley-Wilmarth 345 kV HVTL (TL-17-185, CN-17-184)

LWECS PERMITTED (MS 216F)

- Nobles 2 260 MW Wind Project (WS-17-597, CN-17-289)
- Freeborn 84 MW Wind Farm (WS-17- 410); Site Permit Order Clarified
- Blazing Star 200 MW Wind Project (WS-16-686); Site Permit Amendment
- Lake Benton II 103.5 Wind Project (WS-18-179); Repowering Permit Amendment
- Community Wind North 30 MW (WS-08-1494); Repowering Permit Amendment
- Jeffers Wind 50 MW (WS-05-1220); Repowering Permit Amendment
- Fenton Wind 205 MW (WS-05-1707); Repowering Permit Amendment

PIPELINES PERMITTED (MS 216G)

- Line 4 Relocation (PPL-18-752); Partial Exemption
- Wescott Pipeline (LR-19-228); Information Book

Environmental Review Completed In 2019

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS RELEASED

- NA

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS RELEASED

- Dodge County Wind Project 345 kV HVTL (TL-17-308, CN-17-306); EIS in lieu of an ER (DEIS Issued)
- Huntley-Wilmarth 345 kV HVTL (TL-17-185, CN-17-185); EIS in lieu of an ER

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS RELEASED

- NA

Permits in Process in 2019¹

TRANSMISSION LINES & GENERATION FACILITIES IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS

- Lake Eunice 115 kV HVTL Upgrade (TL-19-311)
- Detroit Lakes Public Utilities 115 KV HVTL (TL-18-755)
- Plum Creek Wind 345 kV HVTL (TL-18-701)
- Huntley-Wilmarth 345 kV HVTL (TL-17-185); Permit Amendment
- Dodge County Wind 345 kV (TL-17-308); Withdrawn from MISO Queue²
- Bull Moose 115 kV Project (TL-15-628); Pending L3R Permit

- Elk Creek 80 MW Solar (GS-19-345)
- Regal 100 MW Solar (GS-19-395)

LWECS IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS

- Buffalo Ridge 109.2 MW Wind Energy (WS-19-394)
- Three Waters 200 MW Wind Farm (WS-19-576)
- Plum Creek 400 MW Wind Farm (WS-18-700)
- Mower County 98.9 MW Wind (WS-05-1707); Repowering Permit Amendment
- Dodge County 170 MW Wind Project (WS-17-307); Pending
- Bitter Root 150 MW Wind Project (WS-17-749); Withdrawn

PIPELINES IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS

- Line 3 Pipeline Replacement (PPL-15-137); Pending Revised EIS

Environmental Review in Process in 2019

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Lake Eunice 115 kV HVTL Upgrade (TL-19-311)
- Detroit Lakes Public Utilities 115 KV HVTL (TL-18-755)
- Elk Creek 80 MW Solar (GS-19-345, CN-19-351); EA in lieu of an ER
- Regal 100 MW Solar (GS-19-395, CN-19-223); EA in lieu of an ER

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Plum Creek 400 MW Wind Farm 345 kV HVTL (TL-18-701, CN-18-699); EIS in lieu of and ER
- Line 3 Crude Oil Pipeline Replacement (PPL-15-137, CN-14-916); Revised FEIS
- Dodge County Wind Project 345 kV HVTL (TL-17-308, CN-17-306); EIS in lieu of an ER, Pending project transmission plans

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Buffalo Ridge 109.2 MW Wind Energy (CN-19-309)
- Three Waters 200 MW Wind Farm (CN-10-154)

¹ Does not include projects in a planning or draft application status. EERA is currently reviewing pre-application materials for several potential 2020 projects, including several hundred megawatts of solar and wind generation permit applications, with potential storage components, and several smaller transmission projects.

² Project will require a transmission line, but there is no current application.