

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 “**2020 Project Status**” report for a record of permitting projects reviewed in the last year.

EERA PROJECTS

Solar energy generation is an important component of Minnesota’s renewable energy portfolio. In siting solar facilities, the Commission must consider the prime farmland exclusion rule contained in the Power Plant Siting Act. The rule prohibits siting power plants on prime farmland where the site includes a half acre per megawatt (MW) of net generating capacity, unless “there is no feasible and prudent alternative.”⁴ EERA and MDA have prepared guidelines⁵ for developers to use in evaluating prudent and feasible alternatives (and considering offsetting benefits). The guidelines have been designed to facilitate solar development while honoring the protection of Minnesota’s most productive croplands.

Decommissioning renewable installations has been a focus of EERA and the Commission. EERA has been working on standardizing the expectations for decommissioning plans filed at construction and the updating of plans throughout the life of the project, based on the findings of the decommissioning work group. EERA reviewed decommissioning plans for 10 new, repowered or existing wind projects in 2020. Of those, three will be revisited in 2021 following the transfer of those permits to new owners. EERA currently anticipates reviewing an additional 20 projects in 2021.

Coordination meetings with tribes continued with EERA meeting with Upper Sioux, Lower Sioux, and Bois Forte. Additional meetings are being scheduled for November and December and will continue into 2021. Coordination meetings are designed to build reciprocal relationships between tribal staff and EERA project managers. EERA is also developing new web content that will include tabs dedicated to tribal information, including a story map that is being developed with the tribes. This map will be interactive and will educate applicants and others on tribes in Minnesota, with each tribe contributing information.

¹ Minnesota Statute [216E](#)

² Minnesota Statute [216F](#)

³ Minnesota Statute [216G](#)

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

⁵ “[Solar Energy Production and Prime Farmland: Guidance for Evaluating Prudent and Feasible Alternatives](#),” EERA, MDA, March 19, 2020

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Permits Issued in 2020

TRANSMISSION LINES & GENERATION FACILITIES PERMITTED (MS 216E)

- Lake Eunice 115 kV HVTL Upgrade (TL-19-311)
- Detroit Lakes Public Utilities 115 KV HVTL (TL-18-755)
- Huntley-Wilmarth 345 kV HVTL (TL-17-185); Permit Amendment
- Cottage Grove Line 0881 115 kV HVTL (MC-19-697); Minor Alteration
- Rosemount Line 0976 345 kV HVTL (MC-19-918); Minor Alteration

LWECS PERMITTED (MS 216F)

- Freeborn 84 MW Wind Farm (WS-17- 410); Site Permit Amendment
- Lake Benton II 103.5 Wind Project (WS-18-179); Transfer to Northern States Power
- Fenton Wind 205 MW (WS-05-1707); Repowering Withdrawn; Other Permit Amendment
- Mower County 98.9 MW Wind (WS-06-91); Repowering Permit Amendment

PIPELINES PERMITTED (MS 216G)

- Line 3 Pipeline Replacement (PPL-15-137, CN-14-916); Reissued following 12/09/19 Revised EIS

Environmental Review Completed In 2020

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS RELEASED

- 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 RELEASED

- NA

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS RELEASED

- Buffalo Ridge 109.2 MW Wind Energy (CN-19-309)

Permits in Process in 2020¹

TRANSMISSION LINES & GENERATION FACILITIES IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS

- Plum Creek Wind 345 kV HVTL (TL-18-701)
- Dodge County Wind 345 kV (TL-17-308); Withdrawn from MISO Queue²
- Big Bend 161 kV HVTL (TL-19-621)
- Frazee to Erie 115 kV HVTL (TL-20-423)

- Elk Creek 80 MW Solar (GS-19-345)
- Regal 100 MW Solar (GS-19-395)
- Red Rock (up to) 60 MW Solar (GS-19-620, CN-19-486)

LWECS IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS

- Dodge County 170 MW Wind Project (WS-17-307); Pending New Transmission Application
- Buffalo Ridge 109.2 MW Wind Energy (WS-19-394)
- Three Waters 200 MW Wind Farm (WS-19-576); Withdrawn, New Application Pending
- Plum Creek 414 MW Wind Farm (WS-18-700); Revised Site Permit Application
- Walleye Wind 111.5 MW Wind Project (WS-20-384)
- Big Bend (up to) MW Wind Project (WS-19-619, CN-19-408)

PIPELINES IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS

- NA

Environmental Review in Process in 2020

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Big Bend/Red Rock (TL-19-621, GS-19-620, CN-19-486); EA in lieu of an ER
- Frazee to Erie 115 kV HVTL (TL-20-423)

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Plum Creek Wind 345 kV HVTL (TL-18-701, CN-18-699); EIS in lieu of an ER
- Dodge County Wind Project 345 kV HVTL (TL-17-308, CN-17-306); EIS in lieu of an ER, Revision pending project transmission plans

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Three Waters 200 MW Wind Farm (CN-19-154); On Hold
- Walleye Wind 111.5 MW Wind Project (CN-20-269)

¹ Does not include projects in a planning status. EERA is currently reviewing pre-application materials for several potential 2021 projects, including several hundred megawatts of solar and wind generation permit applications and several smaller transmission projects. Also, EERA is reviewing pre-construction plans and monitoring construction of a number of wind, transmission and pipeline projects, including Line 3.

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