

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 assistance⁴ 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 “**2021 Project Status**” report for a record of permitting projects reviewed in the last year.

EERA PROJECTS

Vegetation Management Plans are an important component of mitigating the impact of Minnesota’s energy portfolio. Over the past year EERA has administered an interagency working group, bringing staff from DNR, BWSR, MDA and MPCA together to address vegetation management planning for utility scale solar facilities. With the growth of solar projects in Minnesota, developers, legislators, regulators and an array of other stakeholders have recognized the opportunity to develop “stackable” benefits; that is, additional benefits beyond the production of renewable energy. These include improved soil health, water storage, water filtration, carbon sequestration, etc. Developers have expressed a commitment to these goals, and in Commission permits the importance of this opportunity has been recognized through the incorporation of a “beneficial habitat” requirement.

EERA initiated the interagency solar vegetation management planning work group with technical staff at the DNR, MDA, BWSR, and MPCA because collectively the agencies see these goals around beneficial habitat and stackable benefits as a big potential success story for our state. But we also collectively understand that planning for success is critical to achieving it. With this in mind, over the past year our interagency team has pooled technical expertise and on-the-ground experience to assist applicants in their planning. One key result of these efforts was a vegetation management planning guidance document published in March of 2021. The guidance document consolidates the best state agency resources around beneficial habitat planning and provides the tools and information needed to develop, implement, and monitor long-range vegetation management plans.

The interagency group continues to meet, coordinate, and share knowledge. In addition, the group is committed to providing collective, “one-stop-shop” feedback to developers to simplify their coordination process and ensure clear, efficient direction from agency experts.

¹ Minnesota Statute [216E](#)

² Minnesota Statute [216F](#)

³ Minnesota Statute [216G](#)

⁴ Minnesota Statute [216E, Subd. 11](#)

Decommissioning renewable installations has been a focus of EERA and the Commission. EERA anticipates finalizing guidance on its review of applications in late 2021 or early 2022. Consistent with the work group's recommendation, applications for new and repowered facilities contain draft decommissioning plans. EERA reviewed decommissioning plans for 11 new, repowered or existing wind projects in 2021. In addition to new applications filed with the Commission, EERA currently anticipates reviewing an additional 17 projects in 2022 as part of the 5-year review rotation.

Landowners' Choice Program allows landowners along the existing Line 3 to choose either removal or decommissioning in place of the discontinued line. The program includes an independent liaison to ensure program requirements are met, and landowners have access to independent, third-party engineering consultation at the expense of Enbridge Energy. At the direction of the Public Utilities Commission, EERA staff are performing the independent liaison function. EERA engages and directs the expertise of the third-party engineer as appropriate to provide technical assistance, as EERA performs the liaison role and interacts with landowners.

Coordination meetings with tribes continued with EERA meeting with the separate tribes. Coordination meetings are designed to build reciprocal relationships between tribal staff and EERA project managers. EERA has developed new web content that includes tabs dedicated to tribal information. EERA will be 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. Go to the EERA homepage at <https://apps.commerce.state.mn.us/eera/web/page/home> and click on the "Tribal Coordination" tab for more information. Note: The Department is in the process of hiring a new Tribal Liaison.

Permits Issued in 2021

TRANSMISSION LINES & GENERATION FACILITIES PERMITTED (MS 216E)

- Plum Creek Wind 345 kV HVTL (TL-18-701)
- Regal 100 MW Solar (GS-19-395)
- Elk Creek 80 MW Solar (GS-19-495)
- Frazee to Erie 115 kV HVTL (TL-20-423)
- Minneapolis Lines 0811 and 5521 115 kV HVTL (MC-21-547); Minor Alteration

LWECS PERMITTED (MS 216F)

- Grand Meadow 108 MW Wind Farm Repower (WS-07-839); Permit Amendment
- Nobles 201 MW Wind Farm Repower (WS-09-584); Permit Amendment
- Plum Creek 414 MW Wind Farm (WS-18-700)
- Buffalo Ridge 109.2 MW Wind Energy (WS-19-394)
- Walleye Wind 111.5 MW Wind Project (WS-20-384)

PIPELINES PERMITTED (MS 216G)

- Pine Bend Landfill Gas Pipeline (PPL-20-872); Partial Exemption

Environmental Review Completed in 2021

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS RELEASED¹

- Frazee to Erie 115 kV HVTL (TL-20-423)
- Louise 50 MW Solar (GS-20-647)

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS RELEASED

- Plum Creek Wind 345 kV HVTL (TL-18-701, CN-18-699); EIS in lieu of an ER

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS RELEASED

- Walleye Wind 111.5 MW Wind Project (CN-20-269)

¹ EERA filed EAs for Regal Solar, Elk Creek Solar and Buffalo Ridge Wind in 2020, prior to the projects obtaining permits in 2021.

Permits in Process in 2021²

TRANSMISSION LINES & GENERATION FACILITIES IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS (MS 216E)

- Red Rock (up to) 60 MW Solar (GS-19-620), Big Bend 161 kV HVTL (TL-19-621)
- Louise 50 MW Solar (GS-20-647)
- Byron Solar 345 kV HVTL (TL-20-765), Byron Solar 200 MW (GS-20-763)
- Hayward 150 MW Solar (GS-21-113)
- Dodge County Wind 161 kV HVTL (TL-20-867)
- Duluth Loop 115 kV HVTL (TL-21-141)
- Sherco West/East 345 kV HVTL (TL-21-189/190), Sherco 460 MW Solar Project (GS-21-191)
- Permit Transfer of the HVDC System from GRE to Nexus Line, LLC (TL-21-434)³
- Three Waters Wind Farm 161 kV HVTL (TL-21-707)
- Lake Wilson 150 Solar and Battery Project (GS-21-792)

LWECS IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS (MS 216F)

- Community Wind South Repower 30 MW Wind Farm Repower (WS-11-863)
- Big Bend (up to) 300 MW Wind Project (WS-19-619)
- Northern Wind 120 MW Wind Farm (WS-20-860)
- Dodge County 280 MW Wind Project (WS-20-866)
- Three Waters 240 MW Wind Farm (WS-21-706)

PIPELINES IN THE PERMITTING PROCESS (MS 216G)

- Unit 48 Ammonia Pipeline Project (PPL-21-747); Information Book

Environmental Review in Process in 2021

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Big Bend/Red Rock (TL-19-621, GS-19-620, CN-19-486); EA in lieu of an ER
- Byron Solar and HVTL Project (TL-20-763, CN-20-764, GS-20-765); EA in lieu of an ER
- Dodge County Wind Project 161 kV HVTL (TL-20-867, CN-20-865); EA in lieu of an ER
- Hayward 150 MW Solar (GS-21-113, CN-21-112); EA in lieu of an ER
- Sherco Solar and HVTL Project (TL-21-189, TL-21-190, GS-21-191)
- Three Waters 240 MW Wind Farm 161 kV HVTL (TL-21-707, CN-21-705); EA in lieu of an ER
- Lake Wilson 150 Solar and Battery Project (GS-21-792, CN-21-791); EA in lieu of an ER

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Prairie Island Spent Fuel Storage (CN-08-510); Supplemental EIS
- Monticello Dry Cask Storage (CN-21-668); Supplemental EIS

² Does not include projects in a planning status. EERA is currently reviewing pre-application materials for several potential 2022 projects. Also, EERA is reviewing pre-construction plans and monitoring construction of a number of wind, solar, transmission and pipeline projects.

³ EERA staff is providing technical assistance to the Commission concerning the partial permit transfer of the HVDC System from GRE to Nexus Line, LLC.