

Office of Land Management

395 John Ireland Boulevard
Saint Paul, MN 55155
MS 678

October 24, 2024

Rich Davis, Environmental Review Manager
Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
St. Paul MN 55101

RE: In the Matter of the Joint Application of Northern Crescent Solar LLC for a Solar Energy Generating System Site Permit and a Battery Energy Storage System Site Permit for the up to 150 MW Northern Crescent Solar and 50 MW Storage Project in Faribault County, Minnesota.
Docket Numbers: IP-7135/GS-22-57 (Solar Facility) IP-7135/ESS-24-238 (Storage Facility)

Dear Mr. Davis,

On September 20th, 2024, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) and the Minnesota Department of Commerce (DOC) issued a Notice of Public Information and Environmental Assessment Scoping Meetings on the joint application of Northern Crescent Solar LLC (Applicant) for site permits for the proposed Northern Crescent Project, including an up to 150 megawatt alternating current (MWac) solar energy generating system and a 50 MWac battery energy storage system (BESS). The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has reviewed the application and other materials regarding the proposed Project and submits the following comments and recommendations in response to the Notice.

Because of the Project's proximity to and potential impacts on US 169, MnDOT would like to bring awareness to possible impacts on areas of concern or interest listed below. Other possible Project impacts, mitigative suggestions, recommendations, permit requirements, and guidance materials would typically be provided in an attachment to this letter. However, MnDOT has not yet received our requested Utility Early Notification Memo (ENM) response from the Applicant and therefore, additional specifics around actual or perceived impacts cannot be provided at this time. If or when MnDOT can review and provide feedback on the ENM, attention should be paid to MnDOT's requested deliverables as they may be required for future permit application approvals. Additional consultation may be required to address outstanding issues.

Vegetation

The proposed site is adjacent to a known protected vegetation area within the trunk highway (TH) right-of-way (ROW). Any MnDOT permits applied for may need to be reviewed by MnDOT's Office of Environmental Stewardship (OES) Roadside Vegetation Unit prior to approval.

- Native vegetation: Parking, staging, and operating equipment in this area should be kept to a minimum level to accomplish the installation. Parking of vehicles or equipment not directly required for the utility installation in this area should be restricted to the road surfaces. Failure to adhere to these recommendations may lead to unnecessary damage and compaction of native plants and soils.
- Restoration: If areas are disturbed on MnDOT's ROW, the area must be re-established MnDOT Seed Mix: Patch Mix at a rate of 30 lbs per acre. Patch Mix components and rates can be found in the [Guide to the New 2024 MnDOT Seed Mixes](#) . Any erosion control blanket must be free of plastic netting and on the [MnDOT Approved Products List for Rolled Erosion Prevention Products](#) . In addition, any hydraulic mulch used up-slope of Public Waters must be free of plastic fiber additives.

Protected Species

The proposed site is within a protected wildlife area that also encompasses the TH ROW. Any MnDOT permits applied for may need to be reviewed by MnDOT's OES Protected Species Unit prior to approval.

- The Applicant should consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with respect to listed species which may occur within the project area, and limit ground disturbances to the extent practical in areas of semi-natural or natural vegetation. State-listed threatened and endangered species may be in the vicinity. The Applicant should plan to consult with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) to identify recorded locations and conduct species-specific surveys to confirm locations prior to construction. MnDOT requests that copies of all biological field survey data/reports within its ROW be submitted with any permit applications for review.

Access Road(s)

Because there is a direct connection between crash rates and access density on state trunk highways, the Applicant should plan to utilize access points from local roads whenever possible. Access from MnDOT ROW, whether at an existing driveway or new driveway is not guaranteed, and new highway access permits will be required in either case. MnDOT requests that the Applicant further consult with District Permitting and Traffic Control staff for more information about permit applications, processes, and requirements to ensure their chosen points of access have been reviewed by the MnDOT District 7 Access Committee and are permittable.

Water Basin(s)

The Applicant should ensure that the location of the water basin near US 169 ROW will not negatively impact existing land and infrastructure surrounding the project area. Specifically, water basin locations should not change peak runoff rates to the TH ROW. A MnDOT District Hydraulics Engineer may need to review the project to determine if a drainage permit is needed [MnDOT Drainage Permit Application](#). A drainage permit is required for all types of drainage changes on TH ROW.

Should the Commission issue Site Permits for the Project, continued coordination with MnDOT staff is expected. Any MnDOT permits required as a part of this Project can be coordinated at an earlier time but may not be issued until the Commission has approved all necessary permits for this Project. All applicable [permitting](#), [traffic control](#) and construction coordination efforts should be made through the appropriate MnDOT [district staff](#). MnDOT District Specialists should be given the opportunity to participate in pre-construction meetings as they apply to MnDOT- owned property.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

/s/ Stacy Kotch Egstad

Utility Routing and Siting Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Transportation
Office of Land Management
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cc: MnDOT Utility ENM Review Staff

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