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PUBLIC HEARING - 25-89 & 25-88
VIRTUAL - APRIL 7, 2026 - 6:00 P.M.
BEFORE THE COURT OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
FOR THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Joint Application of Summit Lake Solar, LLC, and Summit Lake Storage, LLC, for a Solar Generating System Site Permit and a Battery Energy Storage Site Permit for the up to 200 MW Summit Lake Solar Facility and the up to 200 MW Battery Summit Lake Energy Storage System in Nobles County, Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NOS: IP-7153/GS-25-89 & IP-7153/ESS-25-88
CAH DOCKET NO: 21-2500-41031

Hearing held remotely via:
Webex & Telephone

April 7, 2026

BEFORE: Judge Kimberly Middendorf
STENOGRAPHIC COURT REPORTER: Christine Simons, RMR, RPR

APPEARANCES:

**JEREMY DUEHR, Attorney at Law, Fredrikson
& Byron, P.A., jduehr@fredlaw.com, appeared on
behalf of the Applicants.**

PUC STAFF:

Craig Janezich

Sam Weaver

**WHEREUPON, the following proceedings were
duly had and entered of record, to wit:**

1	I N D E X	
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1 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: All right. Good
2 evening, everyone, and welcome to the public hearing
3 In the Matter of the Joint Site Permit Application
4 of Summit Lake Solar, LLC, for a Solar Energy
5 Generating System Site Permit and a Battery Energy
6 Storage System Site Permit for the up to
7 200-megawatt Summit Lake Solar Facility and Battery
8 Energy Storage System in Nobles County, Minnesota.
9 This is Court of Administrative Hearings Docket
10 Number 21-2500-41031; PUC Docket GS-25-89 and
11 ESS-25-88. Today is April 7th, 2026.

12 My name is Kimberly Middendorf. I'm an
13 Administrative Law Judge with the Minnesota Court of
14 Administrative Hearings. The court is an
15 independent executive branch court, and what that
16 means is it's not affiliated with the Minnesota
17 Public Utilities Commission or with the Applicant.
18 I have been assigned to hold public hearings to
19 obtain public input on these projects. This is a
20 very important part of the process of building a
21 record.

22 The record in this matter will be all of
23 the information that is assembled to present to the
24 Public Utilities Commission for them to consider in
25 making a decision about whether or not these

1 projects should be approved and a permit should be
2 issued so that they can be constructed.

3 The record will contain things like the
4 public comments that we received last night, as well
5 as tonight, as well as any written comments that
6 members of the public want to provide. It also
7 includes things like the Applicant's application and
8 their supporting materials, as well as the
9 environmental assessment, which looks at the
10 environmental impacts that could result from this
11 type of project.

12 All of this information, I will take and
13 consider and use in writing a report to the Public
14 Utilities Commission. That will include findings of
15 fact, conclusions of law, and then recommendations
16 to the Commission about whether or not I believe
17 that the Applicants have satisfied the application
18 requirements that are promulgated under the law.
19 There are certain standards that the Applicant must
20 meet for the projects to be approved. As well as
21 any sort of conditions or things that should be put
22 into any permit that would be issued.

23 The Public Utilities Commission will make
24 the final decision on the permit applications after
25 reviewing your comments, my report, and all of the

1 evidence in the record. That can be viewed on
2 eDockets, which is the Public Utilities Commission's
3 site where they maintain all of the information in
4 each one of the dockets before them, including this
5 one. And you'll hear more later on how to access
6 that information and find the information specific
7 to this project.

8 The purpose of our hearing tonight is to
9 give members of the public an opportunity to provide
10 their views about the project and also to ask
11 questions of the agency and project personnel. The
12 Applicants will also explain what it is they're
13 proposing to do. Public hearings like this are a
14 crucial part of the fact-gathering process that
15 enables the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to
16 make an informed decision on these projects.

17 So tonight, after I'm finished with these
18 opening remarks for you all, we will hear from Craig
19 Janezich of the Public Utilities Commission. He'll
20 provide an overview of the permitting process that
21 the Commission follows. We'll hear from Alia
22 Mohammad on behalf of Geronimo Power, LLC. She'll
23 talk about some features of the project and give an
24 overview of that.

25 Then, we'll hear from Sam Weaver, who is

1 also part of the Public Utilities Commission in its
2 Energy Infrastructure Permitting unit, and
3 Mr. Weaver will discuss the environmental review and
4 analysis that was done with respect to this project.

5 So I encourage anyone who wants to make
6 comments or ask questions to indicate in the chat
7 that you'd like to do so. After we've heard the
8 presentations of our presenters, I'm going to turn
9 it over for comments, and I'll go through everyone
10 who has signed up in the order that you've signed up
11 to let you ask your questions or provide your
12 comments. For those of you that are on the phone,
13 you can get in the queue by pressing *3.

14 All right. And for those of you who
15 would prefer to provide written comments, you can
16 certainly do that. You can also -- and it's really
17 not an either/or proposition; you can do both. Just
18 get your comments in no later than 4:30 p.m. to be
19 considered.

20 Every comment that I receive, whether
21 it's in writing or tonight at our hearing this
22 evening, will be considered by me as I write the
23 report and make recommendations to the Commission,
24 and so I strongly encourage you to take advantage of
25 those opportunities.

1 My report to the Public Utilities
2 Commission is expected to be issued on or around
3 June 19th, and the Commission will make the final
4 decision after that.

5 All right. So with that, I think I will
6 turn it over to Mr. Janezich to provide an overview.

7 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Hello. My name is
8 Craig Janezich, and I work with the Public Utilities
9 Commission. On this slide, it contains my contact
10 information. It's also available on the Public
11 Utilities Commission's website if you're interested
12 in accessing it that way as well.

13 When the Public Utilities Commission
14 makes a decision on a site permit, they look at the
15 Rules in 7850 and Statutes in 216E. There's over a
16 dozen of different factors that we look at, but this
17 is just kind of a condensed list. We look at
18 conserving resources and minimizing environmental
19 impacts; we look at minimizing human settlement and
20 other land-use conflicts; and then, of course, an
21 efficient, cost-effective, secure power supply for
22 Minnesotans.

23 This is a general timeline that we
24 anticipate making a decision. As Judge Middendorf
25 had highlighted, the report that she's going to

1 complete will be to the Commission on June 19th.
2 Exceptions, so if there's some things that folks
3 have a little bit different view of the conclusion
4 that the Administrative Law Judge reached, you have
5 the ability to write in by July 3rd for Commission
6 consideration. And then the Commission will
7 tentatively make a decision on this project in
8 August of 2026.

9 I'll highlight one more date here, and
10 that's the public hearing comment period closes on
11 April 20th, 2026. So for folks who would prefer to
12 communicate that way, please, please do so by
13 April 20th, 2026. Again, this just is a slide --
14 excuse me -- that highlights when the comments are
15 accepted through.

16 The different ways in which individuals
17 can participate: You can do it via the web through
18 that link, email, or U.S. mail. There's also a link
19 for the project website, if you're just looking for
20 some general information on the project.

21 We ask that you focus your comments on
22 the three questions here in this slide, but, of
23 course, anything that you have to say is relevant
24 and the Commissioners will consider that.

25 There's some additional information. If

1 you're interested, there's a project mailing list
2 that will send you an email of -- or U.S. mail of --
3 any project milestones that are occurring, ways to
4 participate. And you can just let us know through
5 the eservice.admin@state.mn.us website, or giving us
6 a call at 651-201-2246.

7 If you're interested in just examining
8 the full case record and everything that's been
9 filed, and what this -- the complete case record, is
10 what the Commission will make its decision on, is
11 everything contained within this website. You would
12 go to eDockets with the website provided, and then
13 you just enter Docket Number 25-88 or 25-89. And
14 you hit the search button, and that shows you all of
15 the comments that have been filed to date.

16 There is another option as well, and that
17 is to subscribe to the docket. In this case,
18 anytime anybody files anything into the record,
19 you'll automatically get an email notifying you of
20 it. Just a warning or some caution with that -- or
21 a heads-up, anyway -- that we do tend to get a lot
22 of comments, and so it might fill up your inbox, so
23 just a warning.

24 And now I will turn it back over to Judge
25 Middendorf.

1 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Thank you,
2 Mr. Janezich.

3 All right. Now, we will hear from the
4 Applicant, Geronimo Power.

5 MS. ALIA MOHAMMAD: Thank you, Your
6 Honor.

7 Good evening, everyone. Thank you for
8 joining us tonight and for taking the time to
9 participate in the Summit Lake solar and BESS public
10 hearing. My name is Alia Mohammad, and I'm a senior
11 permitting specialist with Geronimo Power. I help
12 lead permitting and regulatory compliance for this
13 project.

14 And with me tonight is our broader
15 project team: Karsen Rumpf, senior project
16 developer; Victoria Orchard, project delivery
17 manager; Jeremy Duehr, our attorney with Fredrikson
18 & Byron. We also have Andrew Larson, our battery
19 energy storage system engineer. We're all here to
20 help answer questions and provide clarity where we
21 can.

22 With that, I'll walk through the project
23 details, site characteristics, and environmental
24 considerations that have been evaluated as part of
25 the permitting process.

1 Next slide, please.

2 Geronimo Power is the project developer
3 for Summit Lake solar and battery storage. We're
4 headquartered here in Bloomington, Minnesota, and
5 we've been developing renewable energy projects
6 across the country since 2004.

7 Our focus is on utility-scale solar,
8 wind, and energy storage projects that are
9 farmer-friendly, community-driven, and designed to
10 fit within rural landscapes. We work closely with
11 landowners, local governments, and state agencies to
12 ensure projects are thoughtfully sited and well
13 managed.

14 Nationally, Geronimo Power has over
15 2,800 megawatts either operating or under
16 construction, and we have a strong track record here
17 in Minnesota specifically. That includes projects
18 like Louise Solar, Fillmore Solar, and our Nordic
19 Portfolio, with more than 165 megawatts of solar
20 currently operating in the state and over
21 1,000 megawatts developed in Minnesota to date.
22 We're very familiar with Minnesota's permitting, and
23 take compliance, environmental review, and community
24 engagement seriously.

25 Next slide, please.

1 Here is a high-level overview of the
2 Summit Lake solar and battery storage project. The
3 project includes a 200-megawatt utility-scale solar
4 facility and a 200-megawatt battery energy storage
5 system, or BESS. The project is located in Nobles
6 County, and is sited on approximately 1,417 acres,
7 with a larger area under land control.

8 The facility will interconnect to the
9 existing Nobles substation through a short, roughly,
10 992-foot generation tie-line, which helps limit the
11 need for additional transmission infrastructure.

12 In terms of schedule, construction could
13 begin as early as 2027, with a targeted commercial
14 operation date in 2028.

15 A joint site permit application for both
16 the solar facility and the battery energy storage
17 system was submitted to the Minnesota Public
18 Utilities Commission in February of 2025. In
19 December 2025, we submitted a permit amendment to
20 reflect design updates and refinements based on
21 agency review, technical evaluation, and community
22 feedback.

23 The next few slides will walk through
24 what changed between the original and amended
25 layouts, and how those changes address key siting,

1 environmental, and community considerations.

2 Next slide.

3 This slide shows the original project
4 layout that was presented during the environmental
5 assessment scoping meetings in May of 2025. At that
6 time, this layout reflected our initial site design,
7 including the placement of solar arrays, support
8 infrastructure, and the preliminary location of the
9 battery energy storage system. It was developed
10 using the best information available at that stage
11 of the project and was intended to start
12 conversation and agency review.

13 Since that scoping meeting, we've
14 received feedback from state agencies, local
15 officials, and members of the community, and we've
16 also completed additional technical and
17 environmental analysis. That work helped us better
18 understand site constraints related to setback,
19 drainage, proximity to residences, and overall
20 project layout.

21 As a result, we made several intentional
22 changes to the original design to address those
23 considerations. The next slide will show the
24 amended project footprint and walk through the
25 specific updates we made since last year's scoping

1 meeting.

2 Next slide, please.

3 Based on community input and additional
4 analysis, we made several updates to the original
5 layout to improve siting and reduce potential
6 impacts. One of the most significant changes was
7 relocating the battery energy storage system farther
8 away from the Village of Reading. We also increased
9 setbacks throughout the project. The amended layout
10 includes 150-foot setbacks from nonparticipating
11 residential property lines, and 300-foot setbacks
12 from all existing residences to the solar arrays.

13 From a drainage standpoint, the amended
14 design ensures that no public drain tile will be
15 impacted by the BESS, and public drain tile located
16 northwest of the intersection of McCall Avenue and
17 190th Street will not be disturbed. These changes
18 were made in coordination with our drainage
19 consultants and reflect a more refined understanding
20 of site conditions.

21 In addition to what's shown on the slide,
22 we also added a 50-foot setback from the edge of the
23 public road rights-of-way to the fence line of the
24 project. The adjustment was made specifically to
25 accommodate snow drifting and winter maintenance

1 concerns, and to provide additional buffering along
2 roadways used by the public.

3 Overall, these changes represent a more
4 thoughtful and refined layout than what was
5 initially presented last year. The amended design
6 balances energy production with reduced visual,
7 drainage, and community impacts, and incorporates
8 what we heard through the scoping process.

9 Next slide, please.

10 This slide explains how the solar
11 facility and battery energy storage system operate,
12 both independently and together, as part of the
13 overall project. The solar facility generates
14 electricity when the sun is -- when the sun is
15 shining. Solar panels produce direct current, or DC
16 power, which is a standard characteristic of solar
17 generation.

18 The battery energy storage system also
19 operates in DC, which allows electricity generated
20 by the solar facility to be stored efficiently when
21 production is high. Importantly, the battery system
22 does not generate power on its own. It simply
23 stores electricity and later releases it back to the
24 grid when needed.

25 While the solar and storage system can

1 operate together, they are independently permitted
2 and independently controllable. That means the
3 battery can charge, discharge, or remain idle,
4 regardless of whether the solar facility is
5 producing power at that moment, depending on the
6 grid needs. When electricity is to be delivered to
7 the grid, both the solar and battery systems pass
8 through inverters, which convert DC power to AC
9 power. AC power is what the grid uses and what is
10 delivered to homes and businesses.

11 Next slide, please.

12 Here are the key infrastructure
13 components that make up the solar facility and the
14 battery energy storage system. The project includes
15 access and haul roads, which are used during
16 construction and then maintained for long-term
17 operations and emergency access.

18 The solar facility itself consists of a
19 racking system and solar panels which are mounted on
20 steel piles driven into the ground. This minimizes
21 grading and allows the project to follow existing
22 terrain as much as possible.

23 The battery storage system is housed in
24 an enclosed -- in an enclosed battery unit, designed
25 to meet strict safety and performance standards.

1 These units are monitored continuously and
2 maintained by trained personnel.

3 Electricity moves through the electrical
4 collection system connecting the solar arrays and
5 battery system to inverters and, ultimately, to the
6 project substation. From there, power is safely
7 delivered to the grid.

8 Once construction is complete, the site
9 transitions into operations and maintenance mode,
10 which involves limited on-site traffic, periodic
11 inspections, and routine upkeep. If and when the
12 project reaches the end of its life, the site will
13 be restored in accordance with an approved
14 decommissioning plan.

15 Next slide, please.

16 Here is the focus on how the project is
17 constructed on the ground and how we ensure
18 compliance through construction. Access road
19 construction is one of the first steps. These roads
20 are designed to safely accommodate construction
21 vehicles, while minimizing disruption to surrounding
22 land and existing roads. They also remain in place
23 for long-term operations and emergency access.

24 Construction components and equipment are
25 delivered, controlled -- in a controlled and

1 temporary manner, followed -- following road use
2 plans. We coordinate closely with local officials
3 to ensure deliveries are efficient and minimize
4 impacts to nearby residences and roadways.

5 The solar racking system is installed
6 using pier, or pile, installation, which allows the
7 panels to be mounted without extensive grading.
8 This approach helps preserve existing drainage
9 patterns and soil structure whenever possible.

10 Throughout construction, the project is
11 required to comply with all permit conditions,
12 environmental requirements, and approved plans.
13 Compliance is monitored through inspections and
14 ongoing coordination with state agencies. Overall,
15 the construction project is designed to be
16 temporary, carefully managed, and consistent with
17 commitments made through the permitting process.

18 Next slide, please.

19 This slide shows how the electricity is
20 collected across the site and moved to the
21 substation once it's generated or discharged from
22 the battery system. The project's electrical
23 collection system may be installed below-ground,
24 above-ground, or a hybrid of both, depending on
25 location-specific conditions, such as drainage,

1 environmental constraints, and engineering design.

2 Next slide, please.

3 Here is an example of how stormwater
4 controls are incorporated into the project design,
5 including the basin shown within the fenced area.
6 These basins are used for stormwater management,
7 helping slow, collect, and manage runoff during and
8 after rain events to protect surrounding properties
9 and downstream resources.

10 The basin area is intentionally located
11 within the fence footprint of the project. This
12 allows us to properly maintain the feature over
13 time, and ensures safe and controlled access for
14 vegetation management and inspections, while keeping
15 the area secure.

16 Unlike these pictures shown, which is a
17 chain-link fencing, our project will use an
18 agricultural woven wire fence, approximately
19 seven feet in height, with an additional one-foot at
20 the top consisting of three to four strands of
21 smooth wire. The fencing type is commonly used in
22 agricultural settings and is designed to clearly
23 define the project boundary while remaining
24 compatible with surrounding land use.

25 Vegetation within the fenced area,

1 including around stormwater features, will be
2 actively managed to maintain proper drainage,
3 control erosion, and ensure long-term performance.
4 This includes routine mowing and monitoring as part
5 of the normal operations and maintenance activities.

6 Next slide, please.

7 This slide shows an example of how
8 vegetation establishes over time, in year one, year
9 three, and year seven, including what it looks like
10 underneath the panels as the site matures. You can
11 see that over time, stable and manageable ground
12 cover develops, which supports erosion control,
13 drainage, and long-term site maintenance.

14 I do want to note that the panels shown
15 in these images are fixed-tilt panels, which reflect
16 an older technology. For this project, we will be
17 using single-axis tracking panels, which rotate
18 throughout the day to follow the sun. This movement
19 allows for better light penetration, helps
20 vegetation grow more evenly underneath the panels,
21 and improves overall energy production.

22 Next slide, please.

23 This slide shows a visual rendering from
24 Highway 266, comparing existing conditions with what
25 the site is expected to look like after

1 construction. The picture on the left includes
2 current existing conditions, and the picture on the
3 right is what the view would look like after.

4 Next slide, please.

5 This slide shows the vegetative screening
6 we're proposing around the project, particularly
7 along roadways and areas where the project may be
8 visible from public viewpoints or neighboring
9 properties. We've also added a vegetative screening
10 to mitigate any snow drifting that may occur.

11 Next slide, please.

12 Here, another visual rendering example
13 for vegetative screening around the operations and
14 maintenance building and substation site from the
15 roadway. The top is before and the bottom is after.

16 Next slide, please.

17 This slide summarizes the environmental
18 review and agency coordination that has already
19 taken place for the project. We've completed
20 wetland delineations in coordination with the U.S.
21 Army Corps of Engineers, as well as cultural
22 resource surveys in coordination with the State
23 Historic Preservation Office. Reviews related to
24 threatened and endangered species have also been
25 completed.

1 In addition, the project received a
2 determination of No Hazard from the FAA, and an
3 agricultural impact mitigation plan was developed in
4 coordination with the Minnesota Department of
5 Agriculture. All this coordination informed the
6 site design and the environmental assessment, and
7 reflects the ongoing collaboration with the state
8 and federal agencies as part of the permitting
9 process.

10 Next slide, please.

11 Here is an outline of the economic and
12 community benefits associated with the project.
13 Summit Lake provides direct benefits to
14 participating landowners, local townships, and
15 Nobles County through a combination of lease
16 payments, property and production tax revenue, and
17 construction-related spending.

18 During construction, the project is
19 expected to support up to 250 jobs at peak, with an
20 average of about 175 jobs throughout the
21 construction period. Once operational, the project
22 will support several full-time positions for ongoing
23 operations and maintenance.

24 On an annual basis, the project is
25 estimated to contribute hundreds of thousands of

1 dollars in tax revenue to local governments,
2 including both townships and the county, which help
3 support local services and infrastructure. In
4 addition to these direct impacts, construction
5 activity generates indirect economic benefits for
6 local businesses such as lodging, materials, and
7 services. Overall, these benefits remain local and
8 continue over the life of the project.

9 Next slide, please.

10 Again, we appreciate everyone taking the
11 time to join tonight. Your questions and comments
12 are an important part of the review process and are
13 a part of the official record of the Commission's
14 consideration. If you have any questions, our
15 contact information is provided here on the slide.
16 We're happy to help address your questions as the
17 process moves forward. Thank you, again, for your
18 time.

19 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Thank you,
20 Ms. Mohammad.

21 I note that we've got a few people on
22 the -- in our meeting that are on the phone. Could
23 you read your email address and, maybe, phone number
24 out for those folks in case they do have questions?

25 MS. ALIA MOHAMMAD: Yes, I can do that.

1 So my email -- or my name is Alia Mohammad. My
2 email is AMohammad@GeronimoPower.com. My number is
3 612-474-2681. And then we also have our senior
4 project developer, Karsen Rumpf. His email is
5 KRumpf@GeronimoPower.com; 515-515-8285.

6 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Thank you so much,
7 Ms. Mohammad.

8 Okay. Next, we will hear from Sam Weaver
9 on the environmental review process.

10 And before -- before we hear from him, I
11 just want to remind folks, if you do want to make a
12 comment, please note that in the chat, or press *3
13 if you're on the phone.

14 All right. Mr. Weaver, go ahead whenever
15 you're ready.

16 MR. SAM WEAVER: I am ready. Thank you,
17 Your Honor.

18 Okay, everybody. So, again, my name is
19 Sam, and I am here to talk about what I've been up
20 to since our last scoping meeting, which is writing
21 and preparing the environmental assessment for the
22 project.

23 Next slide.

24 So as I said, I have prepared an
25 environmental assessment for the solar and storage

1 project. The environmental assessment serves as the
2 environmental review document for this project. It
3 looks at the potential human and environmental
4 impacts for the project, and the EA is what will be
5 used by the five Commissioners when -- they are the
6 ones who make that decision about whether or not to
7 issue a permit for the project -- I guess, two
8 permits for the project.

9 Next slide.

10 So as part of the environmental
11 assessment, right, we write about all of the human
12 and environmental impacts. We also issue a draft
13 permit where we can insert special conditions to
14 address the concerns of the public that are brought
15 up during the scoping meetings.

16 So at that meeting that we had last year,
17 people brought up a number of concerns, and I just
18 wanted to put together a few slides showing what we
19 wrote into the environmental assessment and into the
20 draft permit to try and address those concerns that
21 people had.

22 So we inserted a number of noise
23 mitigation requirements that are going to go above
24 and beyond what we usually require applicants to do.
25 We are requiring that the Applicants submit a final

1 preconstruction noise modeling study. They have
2 already done a draft noise modeling study that was
3 included in the environmental assessment, and that
4 reflects the change in where the BESS is proposed to
5 be located. So you can find that draft, but they
6 will have to submit a final preconstruction noise
7 modeling report, making sure that they are in
8 compliance with PCA noise standards. So coming in
9 under 50 decibels.

10 They will also have to come back after
11 construction and do noise monitoring. So the noise
12 modeling just shows, kind of, what they predict
13 sound levels to be when they construct the project,
14 but that noise monitoring is a way to check that
15 noise modeling to make sure that once the project is
16 constructed and operational that none of those
17 residences, none of those other nearby noise
18 receptors, are seeing noise levels above what is
19 legally allowed by the PCA.

20 Finally, we are also having the Applicant
21 provide written notification and maintain a
22 dedicated website to alert any adjacent landowners
23 of construction noise. This is particularly
24 targeted towards pile driving and those other loud
25 construction activities.

1 To address the aesthetic impacts that
2 were brought up, right, people made it very clear
3 that they did not want to look at solar panels, and
4 so we have proposed that the Applicants create a
5 visual screening plan and implement that plan. And
6 as part of this visual screening plan, they have to
7 provide documentation that they coordinated with all
8 the adjacent landowners, the nonparticipating
9 landowners, to make sure that they've at least done
10 their work in soliciting feedback from the public
11 and the people who would be impacted by the
12 aesthetics of this project.

13 We have also incorporated some wildlife
14 protections that the DNR proposed, including
15 lighting, making sure that that lighting is shielded
16 and downward facing, so there isn't light pollution
17 going around from the project; erosion control
18 measures and dust control measures that are all
19 wildlife friendly.

20 Next slide.

21 Drain tile was a big topic of concern,
22 and given that I am not a drain tile expert, but
23 there are folks in Nobles County who are drain tile
24 experts, I kind of worked with people from Nobles
25 County to draft up some language to make sure that

1 those drain tile concerns are addressed.

2 So before construction, they will have to
3 do a drain tile survey that will be done using
4 methods that are agreed upon and approved by the
5 Nobles County Drainage Authority Board. If they
6 find any private drain tile that is connected to
7 county drain tile that they are relocating or
8 removing, all of that private drain tile will have
9 to be reconnected to the county drain tile system
10 following relocation. If there is any damage done
11 to drain tile, it has to be repaired immediately.
12 That immediate repair has to be done by a contractor
13 that's based in Nobles County, and that contractor
14 has to be approved by the Nobles County Drainage
15 Authority Board. So, really trying to shift, kind
16 of, this knowledge here to the folks in Nobles
17 County who know the system well and want to see it
18 done right.

19 I've also proposed a community impact
20 mitigation agreement for the Applicant to enter into
21 with Nobles County. So, right, the community has
22 this, kind of, loss of sense of space, that
23 agricultural culture that a lot of people live out
24 there for, that's -- you know, combined with this,
25 other proposed projects, could be lost. And so this

1 is just a way to hopefully mitigate that community
2 impact that we're seeing as a result of this
3 development.

4 So let's go to the next slide.

5 We've also included a number of special
6 conditions associated with BESS safety and first
7 responder training. Right, worried about potential
8 fire events and who is going to respond, Summit Lake
9 has to distribute a hazard mitigation analysis which
10 will detail the results of equipment testing -- so
11 testing all of the materials used for the batteries
12 and the risk associated with that technology -- to
13 different emergency responders that would
14 potentially have jurisdiction over the project
15 before construction.

16 They also have to provide training on
17 battery technology. Regular training, right, not
18 just for one time before construction, but ongoing
19 training during construction, during operation,
20 post-construction. Just to make sure that if any
21 technology changes, all of those local firefighting
22 crews and other emergency crews are aware of that.
23 And, also, if there's any new equipment or any
24 training that's required to respond to potential
25 BESS incidents, that cost is not going to be borne

1 by local emergency responders. The Applicants would
2 have to pay for that equipment or that training.

3 Next slide.

4 So the environmental assessment, again,
5 has this draft permit. It addresses a lot of those
6 other concerns, things about wildlife. You can find
7 that big document on our EIP website, which is
8 listed there. Go to the Summit Lake Solar Project
9 page.

10 There is also eDockets, which was
11 mentioned earlier, that has everything that's, kind
12 of, ever been done for this project, including the
13 environmental assessment. I also dropped off a
14 physical copy at the Worthington Library, and I have
15 quite a few print copies that you can request. If
16 you want to have a real hardcopy of it, feel free to
17 email me if you would like that.

18 Next slide.

19 And so one other thing I wanted to
20 address, specifically, because I've gotten a few
21 calls from members of the public about this proposed
22 data center. So that proposed data center would be
23 located adjacent to the solar project, and it is
24 discussed briefly in the cumulative impact section
25 of the EA.

1 With that said, the discussion of the
2 overall environmental and human impact of that data
3 center is outside the scope of this EA and the PUC
4 environmental review and permitting process. The
5 Commission does not permit or regulate data centers,
6 unless those data centers are going to include
7 backup generation over 50 megawatts, which is the
8 trigger for environmental review and permitting on
9 our part. To my knowledge, this project does not
10 propose to have generation at that capacity, so it
11 does not fall under our purview.

12 Nobles County is the regulating authority
13 for this project, and if you do have questions or
14 comments about the impacts of the data center,
15 you're going to want to direct them to the folks at
16 Nobles County.

17 I also wanted to say that there is an
18 environmental review process similar to what we have
19 done for the solar and battery project that is
20 happening separately for the data center. That is
21 an AUAR process, and you can find that scoping
22 document at the link that I have included here.

23 If you follow that, it will give you some
24 contact information for who to ask about that
25 project. It includes some information about the

1 project and the impact. So I highly encourage you,
2 if you do have concerns about the data center, to
3 follow that link and check out that process.

4 Next slide.

5 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: All right. Thank you,
6 Mr. Weaver.

7 Okay. Now we are to the point in our
8 proceeding where we will start taking comments. As
9 I mentioned, if you would like to speak, if you are
10 participating via some sort of video format, you can
11 indicate in the chat that you'd like to speak. If
12 you're on the phone, you can press *3 and that will
13 add you to the queue.

14 Just a few comments regarding making
15 comments. It's really important that you state and
16 spell your first and last name. We've got a court
17 reporter. She's taking down everything that's said,
18 and we want to make sure that your comments are
19 fully recorded. You've taken the time to be here
20 and so we want to make sure that we capture
21 everything accurately. Towards that end, we ask
22 that you speak loudly and clearly.

23 Just one speaker at a time. If you've
24 got a question, please wait until the presenter has
25 given their answer before responding. It's really

1 hard for the court reporter to take down what's
2 being said when more than one person is talking.
3 And to make sure that everyone who wants to speak
4 gets a chance, I would ask that you keep your
5 comments to five minutes. If we get through
6 everyone and there's still time, then we can
7 certainly let people speak a second time.

8 Okay. With that, it looks like Marcus
9 Raines is the first one on our list; is that right,
10 Mr. Janezich?

11 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: That's correct, Your
12 Honor. I'm going to find his name here, and I will
13 unmute him.

14 Marcus Raines, you are unmuted. Go ahead
15 with your comments. Can you hear me okay?

16 MR. MARCUS RAINES: Yeah. Am I coming
17 through clear as well, Craig?

18 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Perfect, perfect.

19 MR. MARCUS RAINES: All right. Marcus,
20 M-A-R-C-U-S; Raines, R-A-I-N-E-S.

21 Good evening. I'd like to start by
22 thanking the Public Utilities Commission and the ALJ
23 for taking time to host this proceeding and for the
24 thoughtful attention you've given this project.

25 My name is Marcus Raines. I am a

1 business representative for the Northern Midwest
2 Regional Council of Carpenters. The 200-megawatt
3 Summit solar and battery storage project represents
4 a meaningful investment in our region's energy
5 future.

6 It's not just about generating power,
7 it's about creating opportunity. This project is
8 expected to provide over 170 union jobs, offering
9 family-sustaining wages and benefits, while also
10 creating opportunities to recruit local and utilize
11 skilled local labor. That means real economic
12 impact for the communities surrounding this
13 development with workers who live here, raise their
14 families here, and take pride in building the
15 infrastructure that serves their neighbors.

16 I also want to recognize the Commission
17 for conducting a comprehensive environmental
18 assessment. That level of diligence ensures that
19 projects like this move forward responsibly, with
20 full consideration given to the environmental
21 stewardship and community impact.

22 Geronimo has demonstrated its willingness
23 to meet these standards and has acted as a good
24 faith neighbor throughout the process. Their
25 engagement, responsiveness, and commitment to doing

1 things the right way should not go unnoticed.

2 At the end of the day, this project
3 checks the boxes: It supports our clean energy
4 goals, strengthens the local workforce, and respects
5 the process laid out by our legislators. For those
6 reasons, we respectfully ask the Commission to
7 approve the Summit solar and battery storage
8 project. Thank you for your time and consideration.

9 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Thank you so much for
10 your comment.

11 All right. Next, Darrel Ponto.

12 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Hi, Darrel Ponto.
13 I've just unmuted you.

14 MR. DARREL PONTO: Hello. Are you able
15 to hear me okay?

16 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Yes, perfectly.

17 MR. DARREL PONTO: Okay. Thank you.

18 Good evening, Your Honor. I appreciate
19 you hearing us this evening and listening to our
20 comments. My name is Darrel Ponto, D-A-R-R-E-L,
21 P-O-N-T-O. I live in Summit Lake, Section 22, in
22 the northwest quarter, on the east side of that
23 quarter. I live 500 feet from the northeast quarter
24 where the solar panels are at the westernmost
25 portion of the project.

1 I appreciate our neighbors' comments last
2 night and their opposition to the project. I live
3 500 feet within [sic] the project, and I'm a bit
4 concerned that the Geronimo folks have never
5 contacted us to let us know that this project was
6 coming, especially after hearing last night that
7 this has been going on since 2016. That's quite
8 frustrating, being that close to the project. That
9 would be my first point.

10 I guess I submitted some comments early
11 in the first session -- or first comment period
12 regarding some regular flooding that occurs to the
13 north and east of my place, which would go into the
14 project. I've submitted pictures of that extreme
15 flooding. That flooding has happened in 2011; I
16 believe 2014, I did not capture pictures from it,
17 but that was the year I recall; also 2018 and 2024.

18 The flooding occurs from my driveway all
19 the way to Highway 266. Which the view of the
20 rendering from Highway 266, my place would be to the
21 west of that picture. So the flooding occurs all
22 the way to the highway.

23 I do realize and appreciate that Geronimo
24 has moved some of the solar panels farther to the
25 east, but from the current map pictures that I see,

1 it looks like there would still be a considerable
2 amount of solar panels that would get submerged in
3 water when that flooding occurs. The flooding
4 occurs typically when we get a three- or four-inch
5 rain all at once, and it will last anywhere from
6 seven to ten days.

7 The water in the area where they're
8 planning to place the solar panels can be three- to
9 four-foot deep. So I'm concerned that the panels
10 and the converters -- or inverters would be
11 submerged in water, which is very concerning as far
12 as contaminating the groundwater. I have a drilled
13 well that we use for water for our acreage, and I'm
14 afraid that contamination would get into my
15 groundwater. So I have some concerns as far as
16 that -- in regards to that.

17 So I'm wondering if there is -- as far as
18 from Geronimo, if there is any other consideration
19 for moving the panels out of the flooding zone or
20 flooding area?

21 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Okay. Can someone
22 from Geronimo speak to Mr. Ponto's questions?

23 MS. VICTORIA ORCHARD: Yes, I can speak
24 to that.

25 I'd just like to add that throughout the

1 design process, we do look at those areas where more
2 water has historically flooded on the site, as well
3 as working with our participating landowners to
4 understand how the water moves across the site, both
5 coming onto the site and when exiting the site.

6 So, you know, we want to make sure that
7 we understand historically how the water has been
8 moving, and then we will continue to work with ISG
9 and the local county drainage experts to make sure
10 that we're maintaining drainage moving forward.

11 MR. KARSEN RUMPF: I'd like to add --
12 Karsen Rumpf here.

13 Darrel, I met with Greg Ponto -- I don't
14 know how you guys are related -- about certain
15 county drain tile reroutes that we were proposing
16 for the county. But I always make myself available,
17 so I'd love to talk to you more about the project
18 specifics offline here, but I'll make myself
19 available.

20 MR. DARREL PONTO: Okay. I also wanted
21 to make mention that last fall, I don't know if it
22 was part of your guys' scoping of the project, but
23 the 80 acres that surrounds my acreage was patterned
24 tiled, which will add additional pressure into that
25 area when heavy rains come. So patterned tiling is

1 really close tiling of the field, and it all drains
2 down into the same area. So I'm very concerned
3 about that additional water going into that area and
4 submerging the solar panels even more.

5 MR. KARSEN RUMPF: Yeah. I'd like to
6 talk more offline with you about obtaining tile maps
7 that we can really take more concern about those
8 locations that you're discussing, but I'd be happy
9 to meet with you in person to discuss this more in
10 depth.

11 MR. DARREL PONTO: Okay.

12 MS. VICTORIA ORCHARD: And just to
13 address your comment about, you know, the panels
14 being submerged, we do understand that, you know,
15 there has to be a certain clearance between the
16 panels and any ponding or on-site water basin. So
17 we're looking at that and increasing the length of
18 the piles and the distance between the panels and
19 the ground.

20 And there's been those areas where we
21 have seen historically wet -- you know, wet ponding
22 issues on the site, to make sure that, you know,
23 there won't be any issues where the panels are
24 submerged under ponded water.

25 MS. ALIA MOHAMMAD: Yeah. I also want to

1 add, too, that we also conduct hydrology studies for
2 our projects as well to see the depths of the water.
3 But, yeah, we do that in combination with the drain
4 tile mapping as well.

5 MR. DARREL PONTO: Okay. Thank you for
6 that.

7 The other thing is that, as several
8 neighbors had mentioned last night, this is
9 2,000 acres of land that will be taken out of farm
10 production. Typically in this area, you'll see 225
11 to 250 bushels of corn -- so taking those amount of
12 acres out of production, takes out 500,000 bushels a
13 year, if it were all corn. If it were all soybeans,
14 we average around 80 bushels to the acre, it would
15 take out 160,000 bushels of soybeans in the season.

16 We have locally here a soybean processing
17 plant that processes the soybeans into biodiesel.
18 That plant was built to support the local community,
19 and for us to produce -- for us to get our products
20 to the consumer as biodiesel and other products.

21 Also, we have an ethanol -- that plant is
22 14 miles from this project. We also have an ethanol
23 plant in Heron Lake, Minnesota, that's 25 miles from
24 this project. The loss of that production will hurt
25 both of those facilities as far as them depending on

1 local farmers to support their well-being. Those
2 were built by -- the ethanol plant was built by a
3 group of farmers in this area to help support our
4 products. So, I feel, getting rid of this many
5 acres of land is very detrimental to our local way
6 of life and economy.

7 So that is all I have for comments.
8 Thank you for your time.

9 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Thank you so much,
10 Mr. Ponto.

11 All right. It looks like next up is Jake
12 Cuperus.

13 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Just give me one
14 second, Your Honor, and I will unmute.

15 Okay. Jake Cuperus, you are unmuted and
16 are able to speak now.

17 MR. JAKE CUPERUS: Can you hear me okay?

18 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Perfectly. Thank
19 you.

20 MR. JAKE CUPERUS: All right. Jake
21 Cuperus, J-A-K-E, Cuperus, C-U-P-E-R-U-S.

22 I'm a farmer and resident of Nobles
23 County, and I'd like to express my strong opposition
24 to this proposed Summit Lake [sic] and battery
25 facility. While I'm neutral when it comes to

1 alternative energy, I am firmly against placing
2 industrial-scale developments on prime agricultural
3 land, farmland, particularly, land that is currently
4 zoned heritage agriculture.

5 My family has farmed in this area since
6 the early 1900s. Our community is defined by its
7 agricultural heritage, and converting thousands of
8 acres of productive soil into an industrial site
9 represents an irreversible change. I'm deeply
10 concerned that once this land is developed, it can
11 never truly be restored to its original state.
12 Approving this project sets a dangerous precedence
13 for further industrialization of our rural
14 landscape.

15 While Nobles Cooperative Electric and
16 Geronimo Power may claim that this uses a small
17 percentage of our county land, for local farmers,
18 including my son, which hopes to farm one day, this
19 represents a vital land base in our children's
20 future. I do not support sacrificing our future for
21 corporate profit.

22 Furthermore, industrial projects of this
23 scale do not belong near homes or active
24 agricultural areas. The introduced noise pollution,
25 glare, and potential fire hazards, while damaging

1 property values, local wildlife, and our rural way
2 of life, I urge you to consider the long-term
3 irreversible damage this project will cause to our
4 land and our community character. Please reject
5 this proposal for our farming future.

6 I have one question, were bald eagles
7 studied when considering this? Because I know
8 within the project -- or it's within 1/8 of a mile
9 of Rod Burkard's place, they have a pair of nesting
10 bald eagles and what the affect would be on them.

11 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Mr. Weaver, can you
12 answer Mr. Cuperus' question?

13 MR. SAM WEAVER: Yeah. To my
14 knowledge -- so with bald eagles, what we typically
15 look for is whether or not there are any nests
16 within 660 feet of a project, since that is, kind
17 of, what the Fish and Wildlife Service deems as a
18 distance that would cause disturbance to those
19 animals and could constitute a take under the Bald
20 and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

21 For this project, off the top of my head,
22 I don't think that any bald eagle nests are located
23 within that 660-foot buffer. So there might be, you
24 know, bald eagle nests in the area, but if there are
25 bald eagle nests present, I don't think they're

1 within that 660-foot buffer, but I would be happy to
2 double check that.

3 MR. JAKE CUPERUS: Thank you. That's all
4 I have.

5 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: All right. Thank you,
6 Mr. Cuperus.

7 Okay. So if you would like to make a
8 comment, please let us know in the chat or press *3
9 if you're on the phone.

10 And it looks like Mr. Ponto has an
11 additional comment.

12 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Give me one second,
13 Your Honor, and I will -- I've got to find him on
14 the list.

15 Darrel Ponto, I have unmuted you.

16 MR. DARREL PONTO: Thank you. You're
17 able to hear me again?

18 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Yes, perfectly.

19 MR. DARREL PONTO: Thank you. I just
20 wanted to support Jake's comment as well, as being
21 in opposition to this.

22 And then, also, one thing, I looked
23 further in my notes here and forgot, I was talking
24 about taking the acres out of production, and there
25 has been talk that this is only .2 percent of the

1 farmland in Nobles County. The Southwest Minnesota
2 Economic Development Corp published a document
3 explaining that there would be expanding wind,
4 solar, and possibly data centers, I believe, into
5 over 100,000 acres, going northeast from this
6 project. That, in total, would take out 25 million
7 bushels of corn and 8 million bushels of soybeans,
8 which would be very detrimental to the economy of
9 this area and to the economy of the farmers in this
10 area.

11 So, again, I want to support Jake's
12 comments and my other neighbors' comments in being
13 in strong opposition to this project. Thank you for
14 your time.

15 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Thank you, Mr. Ponto.

16 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Okay. Your Honor --

17 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Go ahead,
18 Mr. Janezich.

19 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Okay. Apologies.
20 Just letting you know, I don't see anybody of the
21 attendees raising their hand yet. Obviously,
22 there's still time. And I don't have anybody in the
23 chat --

24 Oh, I think I'll unmute -- well, I'll
25 defer to you. Sorry, I'm used to the public

1 meetings.

2 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Yeah, it looks like
3 Jill Cuperus would like to speak. So it looks like
4 she's a part of the Cuperus household --

5 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Yeah.

6 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: -- so if you would
7 unmute that line.

8 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Sure, absolutely.

9 Hello, Jill, I have you unmuted and
10 you're able to speak.

11 MS. JILL CUPERUS: Good evening. Can you
12 hear me?

13 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Perfectly.

14 MS. JILL CUPERUS: Perfect. Jill
15 Cuperus, J-I-L-L, C-U-P-E-R-U-S.

16 I just have a question about the
17 permitting. Just how -- how -- we -- you know, if
18 somebody would like to buy land, they are not able
19 to just buy land and build an acreage here. Like,
20 even if it's like ten acres, because of how it's
21 zoned because it's agriculture preservation. So I'm
22 just questioning how we are able -- how this is even
23 being considered to release almost 2,000 acres out
24 of agriculture preservation. It just baffles me.

25 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Does someone from

1 the -- from Geronimo have any insight into, or are
2 able to address, the question?

3 MR. JEREMY DUEHR: Your Honor, this is
4 Jeremy Duehr. I think I can speak to this one.

5 The state permitting process is held at
6 the state level, and the state site permit will
7 preempt and supercede any local zoning rules or
8 zoning ordinances.

9 It does take -- the PUC does take into
10 account local zoning ordinances, and those have been
11 outlined and considered in both the application, as
12 well as the environmental assessment considered by
13 the Public Utilities Commission -- or prepared by
14 the Public Utilities Commission. And so those --
15 they are taken into account, but at the end of the
16 day, the state site permitting process will
17 supercede local zoning.

18 MS. JILL CUPERUS: Okay. Thank you.

19 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Anything else,
20 Ms. Cuperus?

21 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: I accidentally muted
22 her already. Let me unmute her just to make sure
23 there's nothing else. I apologize.

24 MS. JILL CUPERUS: No, that's all I had,
25 Judge. Thank you.

1 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Okay. Thank you.

2 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: Sorry about that.

3 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: That's okay, just as
4 long as we made sure that we got everything that
5 Ms. Cuperus wanted to say.

6 Okay. Any other comments? Anybody else
7 on the line have something they'd like to share or
8 questions for the panelists?

9 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: I'll just -- Your
10 Honor, I'll just highlight that for folks dialing in
11 via phone, press *3. You probably can't see the
12 slide up, but if you'd like to be in the queue, *3
13 will raise your hand and indicate to us that you
14 would like to speak, in addition to anything you
15 might put in the chat, of course.

16 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Thank you.

17 Okay. I don't see anyone else indicating
18 that they want to comment. Why don't we take a
19 five-minute break, and when we come back, if there
20 are no additional comments, we'll go ahead and
21 adjourn; and if there are comments, then we'll hear
22 those.

23 All right. We're going to go off the
24 record and take a five-minute break.

25 (Recess taken from 7:06 to 7:14.)

1 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Okay. It doesn't look
2 like we have any additional requests to speak.

3 Mr. Janezich, do you see anything?

4 MR. CRAIG JANEZICH: I don't, Your Honor,
5 either in the direct chat or in the chat with the
6 group, so...

7 JUDGE MIDDENDORF: Okay. Then, with
8 that, I'm just going to wrap up for the evening. I
9 want to say thank you to everyone who took time out
10 of their busy schedules to participate tonight.
11 This process doesn't work if people don't
12 participate, and so thank you for taking time out of
13 your busy schedules. I know you have more than
14 enough things to do and many ways to spend your
15 time, so thank you for devoting some of it to this
16 hearing.

17 All right. I'll just remind everyone
18 that written comments are open until April 20th. I
19 urge you to take advantage of that if you have
20 additional things that you want to talk about. If
21 there is a neighbor who wasn't able to attend one of
22 these proceedings, please encourage them. I take
23 all of the comments incredibly seriously, and I know
24 the Commission does, too.

25 So, thank you so much , everyone. We're

1 adjourned. Have a wonderful night.

2 (Public hearing concluded at 7:16 p.m.)

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1 STATE OF MINNESOTA)
2 COUNTY OF RAMSEY) SS.

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5 **REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE**
6

7
8 I, Christine Simons, do hereby
9 certify that the above and foregoing transcript,
10 consisting of the preceding 51 pages is a
11 correct transcript of my stenographic notes, and is
12 a full, true and complete transcript of the
13 proceedings to the best of my ability.

14
15 Dated April 20, 2026.
16

17 /s/ Christine Simons
18 CHRISTINE SIMONS
19 Registered Merit Reporter
20 Registered Professional Reporter
21
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23
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