

Written Public Comments Received on the
Scope of the Environmental Assessment for the
Benton Solar Project
Docket Nos. GS-23-423, ESS-24-283, and TL-23-425

Public Comments Received by Staff

Organizations

1. Val Aarsvold, on behalf of the Minnesota Future Farmers of America Foundation

General Public

1. Residents Impacted by Proposed Benton Solar Project
2. Barbara Reese
3. Brent Cronquist
4. Brian McIver
5. Cindy Albright
6. Dan Fiecke
7. Dan Starry
8. Eric Haffner & Heather Schultz
9. Jaclyn & Mitch Litfin
10. Jeffrey Reed
11. Jenna Reed
12. Kurt Adelman
13. Leigh Rusin
14. Matt Braem
15. Micheal Bartowscheski
16. Michael Odenthal
17. Michelle Johnson
18. Patrick Arnold
19. Pete Cosgrove
20. Ronald Oelrich
21. Sarah Feierabend
22. Scott Myers
23. SirWilliam Blahut
24. Steve Jurek
25. Steve Oetken

26. Tamara Sell

27. Tammy Biery

Public Comments Electronically Filed in eDockets

Minnesota State Agencies

Agency	eDockets Number
Minnesota Department of Transportation	<u>20251-214738-01</u>
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	<u>20251-214823-01</u>



Minnesota
FFA FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 365 Plainview, MN 55964
507-534-0188
www.mnffaoundation.org

Val Aarsvold
Executive Director
Minnesota FFA Foundation
PO Box 365
Plainview, MN 55964
Val.aarsvold@mnffaoundation.org

January 30, 2025

Logan Hicks
Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
St. Paul, MN 55101
Docket Number: IP7115/GS-23-423 (Solar Facility),
IP7115/ESS-24-283 (Storage Facility), IP7115/TL-23-425 (Transmission Line)

Subject: Benton Solar Projects - Docket Numbers GS23-423; ESS 24-283; TL 23-425

Dear Mr. Hicks,

I am writing to you as the Executive Director of the Minnesota FFA Foundation, formally known as Minnesota Future Farmers of America Foundation, to provide a perspective on our partnership with Nextera Energy, particularly as it pertains to scoping the Benton Solar project referenced by the docket numbers GS23-423, ESS 24-283, and TL 23-425.

The Minnesota FFA Foundation has been privileged to have Nextera as a Star Partner for the past four years. Throughout this period, Nextera has demonstrated a consistent commitment to our educational programs and community engagement.

Nextera's involvement has significantly enriched our classroom initiatives by linking clean energy careers as viable and exciting options for students and instructors within the field of agricultural education. Their support has facilitated numerous interactions, presentations, and hands-on experiences that have broadened the horizons of our members, fostering a deeper understanding of the intersection between agriculture and renewable energy in Minnesota and nationally. This partnership has not only benefited our students but has also underscored the importance of clean energy in the evolving landscape of agriculture.

While the Minnesota FFA Foundation does not take positions on issues or in regulatory dockets, we can confirm that Nextera has been a valuable community partner. Their ongoing collaboration has been instrumental in advancing the educational and professional opportunities available to our members. We are grateful for Nextera's support and look forward to continuing this fruitful partnership in the future.

Thank you for considering our experience with Nextera as you evaluate the Benton Solar project.
Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Val Aarsvold". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "V" at the beginning.

Val Aarsvold
Executive Director
Minnesota FFA Foundation

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: eera.admin_no_reply@state.mn.us
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 3:37 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Public Comment re: Benton Solar Project
Attachments: Public Comment from Neighbors in Benton County_final.pdf

Benton Solar Project

Submitter Name: Residents impacted by Proposed Benton Solar Project

Submitter Email: jaclynschuldt@gmail.com

Submitter Telephone:

Comment:

Dear Mr. Hicks: Please find enclosed a letter submitted on behalf of and representing the concerns of the local neighbors near the proposed Benton Solar project. We ask the PUC and Commerce Department to hear our concerns regarding our environmental health and deny the permit as it reads today. We are asking for re-routing of the project away from homes, stronger setbacks, and stronger screening of the project- using berms and mature trees at the time of project installation (with dead trees replaced within a few months upon awareness). A full compilation of concerns is attached. Thank you. Attachment enclosed "Public Comment from Neighbors in Benton County_final".

Submit Date: 01/31/2025 09:37 PM

From:
Residents impacted by Proposed Solar Project
Benton County, Minnesota
Reference Enclosed Signatures

1/29/2025

To:
Logan Hicks
Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
St. Paul, MN 55101
651-539-2712

Subject: Strong Opposition to the Benton Solar Project Proposed within our Community-Public Comment- Re: Environmental Assessment Scoping Period

Dear Mr. Hicks:

We are writing on behalf of the residents negatively impacted by the proposed Benton Solar project to express our unwavering opposition to the proposed solar farm development in our community. The location and scale of this project would come at a deeply personal environmental cost to the people, the land, and the way of life that defines our home and sense of community.

Our community is built on hard work, shared values, and a deep connection to the land. The open fields, the rural surroundings, and the fresh air are not just physical spaces; they are the heart of who we are. Children across our residences grow up playing in these fields, we tend to massive gardens, and the quiet evenings with birds at dawn are central to our daily lives. The loss of these simple pleasures is not merely a change to the environmental landscape, but a loss of the very fabric of our built environment. These are the values and spaces we chose to call home, and the proposed solar farm would irreparably alter that.

Environmental health is not only about the relationship between people and their natural environment, but also about how environmental factors can affect human health. It involves the world around us – the built environment and the physical environment as well. We are concerned about all of that, we're concerned about what a project like this will do for not only our air and water quality, but also our well-being, our ecosystems, and the overall quality of life for humans, vegetation and animals alike.

The installation of this solar farm would forever change the peaceful, rural character of our neighborhood. Industrial panels and infrastructure will replace the open farmland with sterile views of metal, wires, and industrialization. These were not the reasons we chose to live here, and the loss of our scenic beauty and rural charm will have profound emotional and environmental impacts. Our community, built on relationships and the shared enjoyment of our surroundings, will no longer be the same. It is not simply an issue of land use—it's an issue of losing what makes this place our home.

At the public meeting in January, residents spoke out in opposition, further underscoring the deep sense of discontent that permeates our community. Not a single landowner testified in support of the project. This speaks volumes about the overwhelming rejection of this proposal. We are particularly concerned about the environmental and health impacts this solar farm will bring, including the destruction of natural habitats, disruption of ecosystems, and changes to water drainage patterns. These environmental changes have the potential to affect local wildlife, pets, and the health of the area's residents. The disruption of this delicate balance will harm not only the environment but also the mental well-being of our families. The stress of living next to an industrial site, where there once were peaceful fields and quiet spaces, will take a toll on our health and peace of mind.

Rain, sunshine, or snow, children from the neighborhood play in these fields, pets run through the tall grass, and deer pass through the open fields and take refuge in the trees. These daily joys are what make our community unique. To lose them would be an unbearable blow to our neighborhood. The health and environmental implications of losing these spaces are far-reaching. This is not just a loss of physical beauty, but of the mental health benefits that these natural spaces bring to our daily lives.

We are also concerned about the long-term viability of the land if this project is permitted. Disrupting the soil, risking erosion, and exposing the land to industrial runoff could harm our local soil, water sources, and our ability to grow food in the future. Our region already faces challenges with water, given the granite layers that are prevalent in central Minnesota. Many of us have

had to raise our homes, fields, and outbuildings to accommodate the abundance of water. The introduction of industrial materials into this already sensitive environment—such as the hazardous-known and yet to be-known- agents within solar equipment and solar panels could leach into our groundwater and pose significant risks to our water quality and public health. This contamination would affect not just our drinking water, but also the health and livelihoods of families who rely on clean water and our local wildlife and vegetation. Given the lack of long-term studies on the health impacts of solar technologies, approving such a project in such close proximity to so many households is irresponsible. The Minnesota Department of Commerce and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) must prioritize the health and safety of our community and not just the wants and financial interest of the project applicant.

In addition, the noise pollution generated by the solar farm will disrupt the peace of our rural community. The hum of inverters, transformers, and ongoing construction and maintenance will negatively impact the quality of life for nearby residents and disturb our pets and the wildlife. The introduction of such constant noise will disturb the natural balance of our homes and properties, threatening the environment we all cherish.

Moreover, the solar company has failed to engage in regular or meaningful dialogue with landowners who oppose the project. Their outreach has been limited, and many residents feel unheard and disregarded. In their application, the company claims that there will be no displacement of residences, but this fails to address the significant impact the project will have on the built environment. Many of the homes in our neighborhood were constructed within the past decade with a careful understanding of the area's peaceful, rural atmosphere. Replacing these neighborhoods' open spaces with an industrial site will affect property values and disrupt daily life in ways that cannot be undone. The transformation of this landscape will harm not only the physical space but also the sense of security and tranquility that residents have built their homes and developed their properties around.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce itself recognizes in its handout passed out on 1/14/2025, that "some landowners are interested in solar farms as a way to generate income and sustain their lands into the future." Well, we're here to say, that while some landowners may benefit from the solar farm project, the vast majority of those most impacted—residents living near the project—will receive no financial compensation and will bear the environmental hazards and personal costs of the proposed development. Within the same document, the Minnesota Department of Commerce also notes that "...though they create renewable energy, solar farms can have human and environmental impacts," and these impacts are precisely what we are raising in opposition to regarding this proposed project. Reality is that majority of the individuals who agreed to sign onto the solar project do not live in proximity to the project and therefore are not going to face the same detrimental impacts as those in direct proximity. The disruption to our built and natural environment, the impact on local wildlife, the land use impacts, and the risks to our long-term health and safety cannot be ignored. These concerns need to be addressed thoroughly, and we urge that the application for permit be denied as it stands today.

Connection to the Environmental Review and Permitting Process: The concerns we have raised in this letter directly relate to the human and environmental impacts of the proposed solar farm. These impacts we've noted align and highlight the importance of the state's environmental review and permitting process. At the public hearing we heard about Minnesota's commitment to "live in productive harmony with nature," and that the environmental review process ensures that such impacts are carefully considered before granting any permits-as part of this process, public participation plays a critical role.

We're writing to say that through your public meeting and comment period, we are opposed to this application for permit and urge the PUC to make informed decisions that recognize first and foremost those who have the most to lose and who are most disproportionately impacted by this proposed project. Please consider us in your decision-making process.

By voicing our concerns, we are participating in this process and exercising our right to provide input on this project. We ask the PUC and the developers to take our concerns seriously, and to conduct a thorough assessment of the potential impacts before moving forward. This includes reevaluating the project's location and ensuring that it is placed away from residential areas, with appropriate mitigation measures in place, especially larger setbacks and stronger screening requirements (at a minimum berms and mature trees at the time of project construction that completely shield the project from sight). We request that the PUC deny this permit and consider alternative sites with fewer impacts on local residents and our collective environmental health.

The state of Minnesota must prioritize the long-term health, safety, and well-being of our community over energy goals. The presence of known and unknown hazardous materials and risks, the disruption of wildlife habitats, the loss of scenic beauty, and the potential health risks posed by this project cannot be ignored.

With passion for our health and livelihoods, we strongly advocate that you take these concerns into account and **deny** this application in favor of developing a more responsible and sustainable approach to renewable energy development.

In summary, we highlight the following environmental concerns:

1. **Land Use and Agricultural Impact:** The conversion of valuable farmland to solar farms would destroy the agricultural vibrancy of our community. We urge the developers and the PUC to seek alternative, less impactful locations for the solar farm, such as industrial/commercial environments, previously disturbed sites that are non-adjacent to residential homes, and greater setbacks from properties. We also recommend exploring sites such as along the highways (research Germany's solar projects), on top of malls and buildings, and not within view of those that call these locations home. We learned that the Department of Commerce has a goal of maintaining sustainable land use practices for future generations, and we hope that there would be a strong restoration plan for the land and strong considerations on how this project will impact our local land use processes and the negative impact this has on rural communities who are already most impacted by so many determinants of health.
2. **Environmental and Aesthetic Disruption:** The industrialization of our scenic farmland would not only harm local wildlife but also significantly degrade the visual character of our community. Much of our neighborhood adheres to covenants which outline requirements such as clean and neat landscaping, control of weeds and invasive vegetations, clean and neat properties, rules against fencing, and etc. to name a few. To mitigate this, we demand that the solar farms not be placed adjacent to our homes and that strong setbacks are maintained with alternate routing. We ask that the applicant be a good neighbor and adhere to our neighborly norms. We ask for comprehensive and robust wildlife protection plans. We also require the creation of visual buffers, no less than berms with mature trees that completely shield the solar properties from sight at the time of construction and installation to minimize the visual damage to the areas. These measures reflect the state's commitment to assessing and mitigating potential impacts on the environment- of which includes the built environment.
3. **Water and Soil Management:** The disruption of soil and potential contamination from runoff could irreparably harm our local fields, yards, and groundwater. We insist on re-routing the project to another location, establishing larger setbacks, setting forth strict erosion control measures, stormwater management strategies, and ongoing monitoring of soil health and water quality. We ask that at a minimum, Benton Solar provide annual well water testing and soil quality testing for each home impacted by the project to monitor for repetitive, long-term exposures to known and unknown environmental health hazards yet to be determined.

If any hazards are identified via testing or otherwise throughout or following the span of the project, we expect that they are remedied immediately, and that Benton Solar incur the costs of all health impact remediation and any costs incurred by residents due to the solar farms. As we know, exposure over time to even small amounts of hazardous agents can wreak havoc across the lifespan, especially among young children. We ask that the project be rerouted away from homes and that wherever the project is placed, that impacts on the environment and that water and soil resources are managed responsibly.

4. **Noise Pollution:** The noise created by inverters and maintenance operations will disrupt both residents and pets (and wildlife alike). To address this, we again ask for the solar farms to be stationed in areas free of residential homes, as well as requiring greater setbacks. We ask for the use of noise-reduction technologies, particularly with inverters and cooling systems. Noisy activities should be restricted to certain hours of the day, and noise impact studies should be conducted to ensure that disturbances are minimized. The inclusion of noise mitigation strategies demonstrates a commitment to balancing human and animal health, mental health, and growth and development over long-term exposures; a core aspect that we request strong environmental prevention measures, such as again – re-routing the project away from homes.
 - Likewise, we would like the PUC to understand and recognize the severe impact to our community during the construction phase, if this project would be permitted. In addition to the noise, our county tax dollars were just used to re-pave our road. In addition to the air pollution, disturbances, and nuisance caused by the construction process.
5. **Health and Safety Concerns:** The presence of hazardous materials and metals in materials and solar panels poses a direct threat to both the environment and human health. We urge that independent studies be conducted on the long-term health effects of exposure to these materials, including voltage exposures, battery fields, smoke from solar farm fires, and so forth, prior to allowing a solar project in proximity to households. As noted in the public hearing, there are no long-term studies on these new technologies on human or environmental health, it would be irresponsible to approve a permit allowing such a large project to surround so many homes. We again ask that the solar farms not be placed in proximity to households, as well as for greater setbacks. Additionally, a comprehensive recycling program for decommissioned solar panels must be established to prevent future contamination as noted related to our ground water, air quality, and animal health, and land use concerns. This addresses the need for careful consideration of human and environmental health risks and generational livelihood in Benton County. As noted again, should any health concerns be identified through the span of the project, we expect nothing less than immediate discontinuation, remedies, and costs covered.
6. **Additional Land and Built/Lived Environment Concerns:** We ask the PUC to recognize the severe elimination of trees, over 10 acres of forested land will be removed. Furthermore, we have concerns about the long-term scope of this project and the restrictions

that this will place on our local community, for some, this project is the span of their lifetime. It cannot be stated enough that the opposition of this project coming to our community and the many facets of environmental health this is impacting. With the vast rolling fields, the elimination of trees not only increases the snow drifts and wind within our neighborhoods, but also the air quality, the increase in heat and temperature from the solar panels to our community (evaluating heat map studies), the risk of fires, dust particles, ongoing exposures, and the glares. Again, we urge the PUC to hear these many concerns and the complexities these will bring to the residents of Benton County and Minnesota who are most impacted by this proposed project.

If the state of Minnesota is truly committed to ensuring that there are minimal impacts to individuals and communities, then the permit must be denied as it is written today.

The overwhelming opposition from local residents makes it clear that this project is not suitable for this proposed area. We urge you to consider alternative locations that do not compromise the future of our community, our health, and our environment.

We stand united in opposition to this project and demand that the PUC prioritize the well-being of our community. We look forward to further dialogue to ensure that our voices are heard and that our concerns are addressed in a fair and transparent manner.

We look forward to your response and are prepared to engage in further dialogue to ensure our concerns are heard and acted upon.

Sincerely,

Residents:

(See Enclosed Signatures, Pages 5,6,7, & 8)

Name Jeffrey Reed
House Number 7634
Street R Mitchel Ct NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/2025

Name Jenna Reed
House Number 7634
Street R Mitchel Court NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/2025

Name Aaron Dresow
House Number 7555
Street R. Mitchel CT NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/2025

Name Alison Dresow
House Number 7555
Street R. Mitchel CT NE
Signature Alison Dresow
Date 1/30/25

Name Tammy Biety
House Number 7558
Street R Mitchel Ct NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/25

Name SCOTT STARK
House Number 7558
Street R Mitche/ Ct NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/25

Name Michelle Johnson
House Number 7104
Street Duelm Rd NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/25

Name Andy McGeary
House Number 7604 Duell Rd NE
Street Duell Rd NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1-30-25

Name Leigh Rusin
House Number 1000 75th Ave. NE
Street 75th Ave. NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/25

Name Luke Rusin
House Number 600
Street 75th Ave. NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/25

Name Jen Carlson
House Number 427
Street 75th Ave NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/25

Name ERIC CARLSON
House Number 427
Street 75th Ave NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1-30-2025

Name Sig Feierabend
House Number 430 75th ave NE
Street 75th ave NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/2025

Name Sarah Feierabend
House Number 430 75th Ave NE
Street 75th Ave NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 01/30/2025

Name Tracy Braem
House Number 41 ~~75th Ave~~
Street 75th Ave NE
Signature Tracy Braem
Date 1-30-25

Name Matt Braem
House Number 41 ~~75th Ave~~
Street 75th Ave NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1-30-2025


Name BRIAN GALT
House Number 210 ~~71st Ave~~
Street 71st Ave NE
Signature Brian Galt
Date 1-30-2025


Name Camryn Geiselhart
House Number 2049
Street 75th Ave NE
Signature Camryn Geiselhart
Date 1/30/2025

Name ~~Camryn~~ Matt Geiselhart
House Number 2049
Street 75th Ave NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/2025

Name Mitchell R Liffin
House Number 7635 R Mitchell Ct
Street R Mitchell Ct NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/30/2025

Name Jaclyn Liffin
House Number 7635
Street R Mitchell Ct. NE
Signature [Signature]
Date 1/31/2025

Name TAMARA SELL
House Number 112 75th AVE NE
Street _____
Signature 
Date 4/31/25

Name 
House Number 112 75th AVE NE
Street _____
Signature Michael O'Senthal
Date 1-31-25

Name DAVE ZORMEIER
House Number 335
Street 75th AVE NE
Signature *REQUEST TO BE ADDED
Date 1/30/25 - 7:42pm
^{VIA TEXT}

Name LYNN J. CAIRNS
House Number 7668
Street R. MITCHELL CT NE
Signature *REQUEST TO BE ADDED VIA
Date 1/30/25 - 6:06pm TEXT

Name JOHN D. OLSEN
House Number 7668
Street R. MITCHELL CT NE
Signature *REQUEST TO BE ADDED VIA
Date 1/30/25 - 6:06pm TEXT

Name STEVE JUREK
House Number Landowner
Street 75th AVE.
Signature *REQUEST TO BE ADDED
Date 1/31/24 1:58pm VIA TEXT

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Barbara Reese <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2025 7:10 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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Do not select links or open attachments unless verified. Report all suspicious emails to Minnesota IT Services Security Operations Center.

January 29, 2025 @ 01:09am

I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I urge you to support the Benton Solar project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line and approve the project permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

By supporting Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line route, we can unlock a unique opportunity for our community to receive millions of dollars in additional tax revenue over the project's lifetime. This revenue can be used to address the needs and priorities set by our local government, such as improving our public schools, maintaining our roads, undertaking special projects and fostering the growth of our community and local businesses.

In addition, supporting renewable energy within our community allows us to safeguard landowners' rights and empower local citizens to have a say in how their land is used. Moreover, it encourages the production of homegrown energy, contributing to a sustainable future.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Miss Barbara Reese
713 6th Littlefalls,
Little Falls, MN 56345

barbreese941@gmail.com
320-469-1048

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: eera.admin_no_reply@state.mn.us
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 2025 9:28 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Public Comment re: Benton Solar Project

You don't often get email from eera.admin_no_reply@state.mn.us. [Learn why this is important](#)

Benton Solar Project

Submitter Name: Brent Cronquist

Submitter Email: captainwheat@gmail.com

Submitter Telephone: (320) 828-0988

Comment:

why weren't we sent any correspondence regarding this project? What are the health hazards? Security hazards? Property value? Loss Reduction in taxes due to reduction in value? Will the sites be eco friendly? Maintained? Will the sites be hidden to prevent eyesore? Will there be an extension regarding public info/input? Seems a very short window of time to prevent questions and concerns Would probably have more if given more time and info

Submit Date: 01/30/2025 03:28 PM

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Brian McIver <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 7:37 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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January 31, 2025 @ 02:27am

I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I support Benton Solar and urge you to approve the project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line will bring significant opportunities to Benton County, such as increased tax revenue, predictable, steady, and diversified income for our landowners, and up to approximately 300 construction jobs and long-term jobs that manage and operate Benton Solar—providing more opportunity for our young people to live and work in Benton County. It also helps move our country towards energy independence.

The time to take action is now.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights, and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Brian McIver
604 Brooke Ave. Foley Mn. ,
Foley, MN 56329
bmtm4@hotmail.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Cindy Albright <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 8:45 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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January 29, 2025 @ 02:44pm
I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I support Benton Solar and urge you to approve the project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line will bring significant opportunities to Benton County, such as increased tax revenue, predictable, steady, and diversified income for our landowners, and up to approximately 300 construction jobs and long-term jobs that manage and operate Benton Solar—providing more opportunity for our young people to live and work in Benton County. It also helps move our country towards energy independence.

The time to take action is now.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights, and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Cindy Albright
9 Sycamore Rd SE, Foley ,
Foley, MN 56329
moerogstad@gmail.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Dan Fiecke <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Wednesday, January 15, 2025 7:11 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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Do not select links or open attachments unless verified. Report all suspicious emails to Minnesota IT Services Security Operations Center.

January 15, 2025 @ 01:11pm
I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I support Benton Solar and urge you to approve the project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line will bring significant opportunities to Benton County, such as increased tax revenue, predictable, steady, and diversified income for our landowners, and up to approximately 300 construction jobs and long-term jobs that manage and operate Benton Solar—providing more opportunity for our young people to live and work in Benton County. It also helps move our country towards energy independence.

The time to take action is now.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights, and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Dan Fiecke
33202 63rd St.,
Pierz, MN 56364
fiecke1956@yahoo.com

PUBLIC COMMENT FORM

Benton Solar Project

Docket No. IP7115/GS-23-423; ESS-24-283; TL-23-425

Name: DAN STARRY
Street Address: 5075 16th ST. NE
City: SAUK RAPID State: MN ZIP: 56379
Email or Phone: dstarry@live.com

Please share your comments on the environmental assessment (EA) that will be prepared for the Northern Crescent Solar and Storage Project:

- What potential human and environmental impacts should be studied in the EA for this project?
- What are the possible methods to minimize, mitigate, or avoid these impacts?
- Are there any unique characteristics of the proposed project that should be considered in the EA?
- Are there other routes for the transmission line that should be considered? If so, please provide a map and a description of the proposed route.

COMMENTS MUST BE POST MARKED OR RECEIVED BY FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2025. ✕

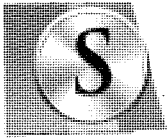
LAND AREA OF BATTERY STORAGE ?
BATTERY MFG AND COUNTRY OF ORIGIN ?
LIFE OF BATTERY ?
LIFE OF SOLAR PANEL ?
SOLAR PANEL DISPOSAL LOCATION ?
WHEN DOES SOLAR PANEL START TO DEGRADE ?
~~WHO MAKES THE~~
WHO PAYS FOR TOTAL OPERATIONAL COSTS ?
AT WHAT POINT WILL THE GOVERNMENT
BEGIN TO SUBSIDIZE THE OPERATION

Signature: Dan Starry Date: 1-15-25

Please submit this form at today's meeting or mail it to the address provided on the back. Please use additional sheets as necessary. Comments can also be e-mailed to the Department of Commerce Environmental Review Manager, Logan Hicks, at: <mailto:logan.m.hicks@state.mn.us>.

DID NOT ASK QUESTIONS AT THE MEETING IN SAUK RAPIDS BECAUSE I THOUGHT THE MEETING WAS CANCELLED

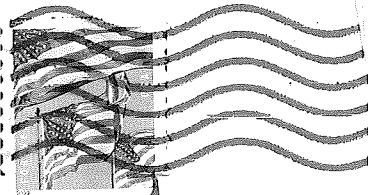
FOLD HERE



Daniel Starry
5075 16th St. NE
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379

MINNEAPOLIS MN 553

22 JAN 2025 PM 4 L



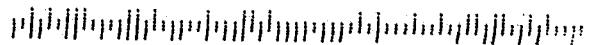
Logan Hicks
Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
St. Paul, MN 55101-2198

MAILROOM

JAN 27 2025

RECEIVED

5510182143 C012



FOLD HERE

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Q Q <whitetigger27@hotmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 7:13 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Public Inquiry re: Benton Solar Project

[You don't often get email from whitetigger27@hotmail.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

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We as residents in the project area were unaware that this solar farm was included with the transmission line replacement. We received awareness about the lines being replaced but no communications about the details of what is going in our neighborhood. No meeting dates. Since we live here I'm not sure why we were not properly informed about this project!! We are very concerned about house insurance rates going up due to this solar farm and battery storage system due to the fire risks. not excluding the fact our house would lose value. We moved here for the scenery and wild life habitat . This will disrupt all of that. In addition to the habitat disruption it's concerning that defective solar panels would leach potential hazardous toxic chemicals into our drinking water/soil if not properly managed. There is no direct benefit for us to have this ugly eye sore in our neighborhood. Everyone in this neighborhood should have received all the detailed information that is on this website! If this is how this project was started people not being informed how do we know if other hazardous spills /issues won't be hidden from us! If it were not for a random person printing out flyers and putting them on our mailbox in the neighborhood with only 2 days to respond we would not have known this project was happening. In the future thr public should be informed about any future meetings especially the people that are directly affected. We have 2 properties adjoining this project so this is very concerning and directly affects us.

Sincerely,

Eric Haffner
Heather Schultz

424 55th Avenue NE St. Cloud MN 56304
20 55th Avenue NE St. Cloud MN 56304
320-253-1221

Sent from my iPad

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: eera.admin_no_reply@state.mn.us
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 4:26 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Public Comment re: Benton Solar Project
Attachments: PFAS.pdf

Benton Solar Project

Submitter Name: Jaclyn/Mitch Litfin

Submitter Email: jaclynschuldt@gmail.com

Submitter Telephone:

Comment:

Mr. Hicks / Public Utilities Commission /Administrative Law Judge - As I'm reflecting on the last couple of weeks since the public hearing for the environmental review, I can't help but recognize all the sleep I have lost. I stay awake at night because of the angst I am hearing among my neighbors, my friends, and my community- and honestly - for myself and my family. It saddens me to think that the place that we chose to build our home forever and the environment we selected to grow old in is threatened with a different landscape. I smile at the memory I have from the first time my then boyfriend brought me out here to look at the land. He picked me a wildflower that day, that I still have in a frame next to our front door. I think about all of our memories, the breaking ground in the building of our home, the day my husband proposed on our property, our wedding, which took place in our yard, and the many other memories of holiday gatherings, playing outside in the yard with our dogs, the neighborhood and friends' picnics, and all of the gardening, so much gardening, and landscaping, and planting of wildflowers for the butterflies and bees - so much of what has brought us so much happiness - is related to us choosing this environment to live in. We really love ending our summer evenings in the hammock watching out over the fields and sunset - cranes, eagles, hawks and birds flying overhead. Our dogs play in the snow in the winters ? and - we get to see our neighborhood kids out ice skating - it really is bliss. We don't want to lose this; it is a great place to be - and we hope you hear us in your heart when we say that we are concerned. We also hope that you share our sentiments with those in which you are connected to related to this project. Some additional concerns- A component that has not yet been discussed in any of the information sessions (that I am aware of)? Our Neighborhoods and the site in which this solar project is proposed is sandwiched between two areas of PFAS concern - Sauk Rapids and Princeton (see enclosed map). Has there been any research into solar and PFAS exposures/risk in Minnesota? I would ask that you please look into this further in regard to our human and environmental health. As many of our properties include private wells, we often look to wastewater testing of nearby cities to assess health issues and risks. I believe that Benton County has cultural and historical lands- I am not sure if this is something that has been studied or reviewed. I would like to request that this is also looked into. I am also aware that there are species of Bats within our County that are endangered. I would request that this is looked into, especially with the removal of the trees on the land proposed. Furthermore, as you heard in the evening of the public hearing, many concerns exist around the massive change to our

environmental landscapes surrounding our homes. I would like to ask that you develop within your assessment more stringent screening requirements and considerations as to how this project will impact the local neighbors and their mental health (which impacts their physical health as well). This is a concern as our environment has so much to do with our physical health, our neighborhood is currently one that is outdoors and active - I worry about what this proposed project will do and how that will impact the use of the land and roads. As you can imagine, solar farms would not make the best de-stressing evening walking views. It might sound like a small thing, but the stress that this proposed project has already caused all of us is only a glimmer of what is to come if this project gets permitted. The impacts to our community cannot be understated. There is genuine sadness around our community in relation to this proposed project and I wonder what that will do to Benton County, the population size of Benton County in the future, the generations that do not stay, and the sense of community that we have today. Rural communities are already hit hard with lack of resources, lack of access, lack of built environment, and poorer health outcomes- I strongly hope that you consider the broader environmental ways that this will impact the people who live here and how this will make it harder for them to live, work, grow, and play in a healthy way. Please don't allow this project to take away the best parts of our surroundings - please factor in all of this and provide recommendations to move this project away from our homes- there is a lot of land out there that does not have homes mixed in. Our community wellbeing shouldn't be overlooked as a way to save money on a solar project development - if there is land that is a better fit, even if it cost more to the developer, that should be considered - because at the end of the day it is the individuals who live here who are going to suffer. Please strongly consider the number of voices you are hearing from that are opposed to this project in comparison to the small few that are in support of this project. I planted rows and rows of wildflowers last year and can't wait until spring to see how they take off! We're hoping that those views are not tainted with rows of solar behind them. Thank you for listening to us. Jaclyn Litfin and Mitch Litfin

Submit Date: 01/31/2025 10:26 PM

PFAS Testing of Minnesota Community Water Systems

Click for More Information About PFAS



About Map: Testing Status Map: MDH Guidance Map: EPA Standards Table: Testing Status Table: MDH Guidance Table: EPA Standards What We Are Doing

Map Use Instructions

This map summarizes the latest test results for PFAS in active Minnesota community water systems (CWSs) in relation to federal maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) (PDF). Click a dot on the map to show summary information for that CWS.

The range shows the highest and lowest running average of test results across the CWS sites that distribute water ("entry points"). CWSs that distribute water from one entry point have one set of results shown instead of a range.

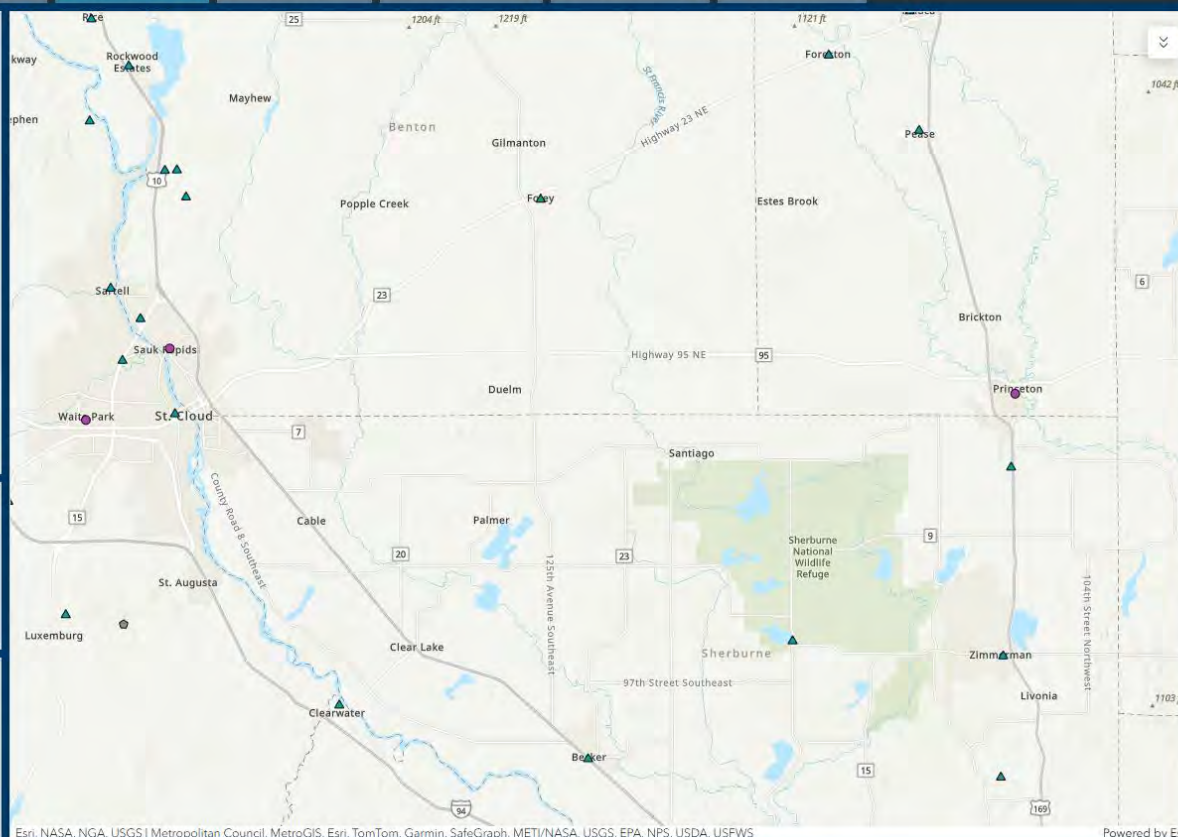
Only PFAS that were detected are shown.

Community Water System Results

Maximum PFAS Hazard Index (HI)

- PFAS levels above MCL
- ▲ PFAS levels at or below MCL
- Purchased Water Systems

Systems marked as exceeding the MCL may have PFOS, PFOA, PFNA, PFHxS, or HFPO-DA levels above the MCL or have a hazard index greater than 1. Click symbol on map for additional information for each system.



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS | Metropolitan Council, MetroGIS, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS

Powered by Esri

About PFAS Hazard Index calculation

A hazard index (HI) accounts for the increased risk from mixtures of PFAS that may be found in drinking water.

The PFAS HI considers the different levels of PFNA, HPFO-DA, PFHxS, and PFBS to determine if the combined levels in drinking water pose a risk. The HI is calculated by dividing the concentration of each PFAS by the concentration at which no health effects are expected, and then adds the values for each PFAS.

$$\text{Hazard Index} = \left(\frac{\text{HPFO-DA}_{\text{conc}}}{10 \text{ ppt}} \right) + \left(\frac{\text{PFHxS}_{\text{conc}}}{12000 \text{ ppt}} \right) + \left(\frac{\text{PFNA}_{\text{conc}}}{10 \text{ ppt}} \right) + \left(\frac{\text{PFBS}_{\text{conc}}}{10 \text{ ppt}} \right)$$

About Maximum Contaminant Levels

Maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) are established by the US EPA. All community water systems in Minnesota must meet these standards. Drinking water that meets all MCLs is safe to drink for most people. People of a certain age or with special health conditions - like a fetus, infants, children, elderly, and people with impaired immunity - may need to

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Jeffrey Reed <Jeffrey.Reed@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 9:08 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Cc: Jenna Reed 🤗
Subject: Benton Solar Project Correspondence

Importance: High

You don't often get email from jeffrey.reed@hotmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Hi Logan,

Thank you for hearing me and some of my neighbors speak tonight at the Sauk Rapids Government Center meeting. I hope you came to understand how impactful this project is to our well-being, and our overall satisfaction with where we live.

My wife and I got engaged out at our property before our home was built. It was neat to hear that our neighbors also got engaged out there. We hope to continue living a good life out at the Reed Ranch without having to be surrounded by a visible solar field.

An expectation for NextEra to install a hill while planting vegetation all over it would be a way in which the government could protect us in terms of minimizing the visual impact to our property and its value. We are good people who pay good taxes. I hope we matter. A simple solution would have been for NextEra to choose land that is not adjacent to residential property...

Please note that my wife, Jenna, who is much more eloquent will be providing additional correspondence and information in a separate email. Thank you in advance for advocating for us as best you can.

Jeffrey Reed
(320) 291-9843
Jeffrey.Reed@hotmail.com

Regarding the Benton Solar Project

January 29, 2025

Dear Mr. Logan Hicks and Others Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to offer my commentary on the Benton Solar Project, which is proposed for installation in my neighborhood. My name is Jenna Reed, and I reside at 7634 R Mitchel Court NE, Sauk Rapids, MN 56379. Without residing in the same neighborhood or one close by, I recognize your frame of reference for what that means is limited; I intend to share what it means to me as you consider this project's implementation.

In 2018, I met my now-husband. In the early stages of our relationship, we shared a dream of building a house on an acreage lot and raising a family. One day, we hoped our home would be a legacy property for our family and our children. My husband found the property we currently own years ago, long before he ever met me, dreaming of purchasing it but not able to quite make it possible financially. In the fall of 2018, he showed me. In a quiet cul-de-sac about 15 minutes outside of St. Cloud, surrounded by roaming farm fields, tall trees, and nature as far as one could see, sat an almost 10 acre property for sale. In the front of the property, the tiniest trees I'd ever seen covered about half of it, and in the back of the property, the most beautiful pond. I fell in love immediately. Only dating for just a few months then, we decided if the property was still for sale in the spring, we'd have a conversation about what to do next. Lo and behold, it was still for sale in spring 2019. We decided to buy it. We closed in June 2019, dreaming about what we'd build and who our family would be.



We visited our land every few weeks, watching the seasons change, and getting to know our future neighbors. We waited for the right time to take the next steps. On February 21, 2020, my husband proposed to me on our property, our land being the true start of our shared life's adventure together. This kicked off our home-building process - we scouted builders and homes and floor plans for months. On top of planning a wedding, my husband worked three jobs so we could ensure that, financially, the home we were dreaming of could be a reality. We got married on July 31, 2021. After our wedding, one of our first stops as a married couple was to our land to see that the foundation of our home had been poured while we were out of town.



We moved into our home on Christmas Eve in 2021. Surrounded by my in-laws, we ate take out pizza at our kitchen island and dreamt about all of the memories we'd have as a family at what we now call the Reed Ranch. I will never forget waking up in my new home on Christmas morning, looking out my living room window, and realizing we accomplished our dream.



Fast forward to now, the Reed Ranch is the hub of our family. Here, we host family holidays, have spent countless hours pouring blood, sweat, and tears into making it our own, and we've established relationships with our neighbors. We all share a similar story about coming to live here and what this place means to us.

At 9 months pregnant with our first child - a boy - I envision what his childhood will look like on our property. I dream about what impact the Reed Ranch will have on him as he grows into a man. I look out my kitchen window and watch the most beautiful sunsets. Most don't know this, but we strategically placed our home's floor plan to capture those sunsets; a decision I'm grateful for every night. Everyone who lives out here knows that in the fall, the sunsets are magical. I watch deer, eagles, geese, ducklings, and sandhill cranes coexist in the pond in our backyard. And on my nightly walk with our 3-year-old Golden Retriever, I marvel at the beauty of the place I get to call home.



However, since the Benton Solar Project has become increasingly more and more a reality, the dream I have worked so hard for, the peace I find in my home and my neighborhood, has been shaken. I fear it will never be restored. There are no words that can describe what my family and I, and our neighbors, will lose if our residential area becomes surrounded by a solar farm. Our neighborhood is proposed to be completely surrounded by solar farms, including an installation in phase 3 across the pond in my backyard. My home will never be the same.



At most, I would request solar farms not be installed within direct view of residential areas. Of the 900+ acres in this proposed project, not many of them are next-door neighbors with homes and neighborhoods. A decrease in project size would marginally impact the NextEra proposal and production of solar energy. It would dramatically increase the quality of life for those who chose to establish their homes and lives in this community like I did.

At the absolute least, I would request a berm around any solar field visible to residential properties, with mature trees placed on top. At present, Adam with NextEra has communicated to me directly that what will be placed around the solar farm next to my home will be a fence with razor wire on top related to "the budget." I am sick to my stomach to envision looking out of the windows of my home or being outside on my property and seeing a fence with barbed wire around acres and acres of technology; it's in direct conflict with everything I love about my home and the area I live in. Should this be approved in this manner, it will feel like the wishes of an out of state, big corporation, seeking to make money matters more than preserving the livelihood of community members residing next to this project. While I don't know what the NextEra budget is, I know those who have entered into land use agreements with this company will be compensated heavily. I find it hard to believe there is not room in the budget for NextEra to invest in a reasonably small ask from neighbors to ensure that for the next 30+ years, we can coexist.

While solar energy offers an attractive addition to our existing energy sources, there is not much known about the long-term health impacts of living next to a solar farm. I worry about the quality of my well-water, not far from the wires which will be buried underground near my home. I wonder if 30 years from now, when this project is set to close, we will learn about significant health impacts after we have had time to study them longitudinally. For me and my family, it will be too late to mitigate them.

As I watch the wildlife roam freely from the fields my home is surrounded by to my home and those of my neighbors, I wonder where all of those animals will be displaced to. They don't have a voice to share about the possible loss of their home, and they don't even know it might be coming.

As I think about this project, I grieve the loss of the dream my husband and I have worked so hard for. It makes me consider selling my home, but who wants to buy a home completely surrounded by solar farms? While NextEra reports it will not impact property value, there is no way to ascertain that my home's current value stays the same; those who want to live in harmony with nature do not live next to 900 acres of solar panels, nor do they want to pay what my home is currently valued at to do it.

To me, this project is about more than installation of solar energy; it threatens my way of life and the things I value so dearly. I can only hope that my voice, small in comparison to an extremely large corporation, can adequately paint the picture of all my family and I stand to lose if this project is approved without significant consideration of the residents who would be forced to live next door.

Thank you for reading. Please protect us.

Jenna Reed
7634 R Mitchel Court NE
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379
(763) 742-9422

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Kurt Adelman <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Sunday, January 26, 2025 6:14 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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January 27, 2025 @ 12:13am

I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I want to emphasize the significance of supporting the Benton Solar project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line and urge you to approve the project permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

Supporting Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system, and associated transmission line gives us a unique opportunity to generate millions of dollars in additional tax revenue over the life of the project. This revenue, based on the needs and decisions of our local government, can play a vital role in supporting our public schools, maintaining our roads, funding special projects and fostering the growth and vitality of our community and local businesses.

Furthermore, by embracing renewable energy within our community, we can protect landowners' rights and empower local citizens to have a voice in determining how their land is used. This support also encourages the production of homegrown energy, paving the way for a sustainable future.

I cannot stress the importance of acting now.

Together, we can shape a brighter future for our community's economic growth and environmental well-being.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Kurt Adelman

9596 highway 95 NE, foley,
Foley, MN 56329
kurt.adelman@icloud.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Leigh Rusin <lrusin@live.com>
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 4:00 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Benton Solar Project
Attachments: Solar Field objection letter.pages

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Dear Mr. Hicks,
I have attached my letter and comments regarding the Benton Solar Project in a PDF which includes some photos so you have a better understanding. If for some reason technology fails me and you are unable to read the attachment, I have included the written portion of the attachment in the body of the email.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Leigh Rusin
600 75th Ave NE Sauk Rapids, MN 56379

January 31, 2025

Logan Hicks
Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
St. Paul, MN 55101

RE: Benton Solar Project
Docket No. IP7115/GS-23-423; ESS-24-283; TL-23-425

Dear Mr. Hicks and Whomever It May Concern,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the planned solar field project by Benton Solar in Benton County and the city of Sauk Rapids area.

I have lived in rural central Minnesota my entire life. I love nature and spend a ton of time outdoors, and grew up in an area very similar to this one. Rural. Far enough out of town that you feel peace, but close enough to get to work and kids activities. Ponds and lakes surrounded by farm fields dotted with oak forests. And even though I have lived in a similar place, let me tell you, this place is special. I have never seen the abundance or variety of wildlife on a daily basis that I have seen since living here.

The area of the proposed solar field is the perfect culmination of ecosystems. Sandwiched between the Mississippi River and the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, interspersed with the Elk River, numerous ponds and lakes, farm fields and forests, this area provides an ideal habitat for a wild variety of wildlife. I fear that placing a solar field surrounded by fencing will negatively impact the ability of the local wildlife to migrate, feed, and raise their young. This area is a Mecca for migratory birds in both the spring and fall. My husband and I have recorded more than 60

bird species in this area, and we aren't even birders! Flying back and forth from fields to ponds to feed and rest. Trumpeter Swans (a Special Concern species for the state of Minnesota) and Sandhill cranes raise their young in these fields and ponds every summer (please see attached photo taken on our property of Trumpeter Swans and their young).

We see multiple Bald and Golden eagles every day. I worry that the hunting grounds for the many coyote packs will be cordoned off, the fields where deer and sandhill cranes feed and birds of prey and owls hunt will be nonexistent. How will the Northern Harrier hover above the farm fields looking for food if it is covered in solar panels? We had a Blanding's turtle (a Threatened Species in the state of Minnesota) on our driveway, making its way to the proposed solar fields to lay eggs (please see attached photos). We have also had a Karner Blue Butterfly (an Endangered Species in the state of Minnesota and is also considered endangered at the Federal level) enjoying the native flowers we use to landscape our home. This is a balanced ecosystem that should not be disrupted by infrastructure that inhibits wildlife, including those that are threatened and endangered, and needs to be protected.

The area of the proposed solar field is in a residential area. This area is a neighborhood. It is not some field with nothing surrounding it but industrial buildings and more farm fields. Nonresidential areas are a more appropriate location for a solar field than where people live and are raising their families. This is a neighborhood where we take in our neighbors trash cans when they are on vacation and we come together for potlucks because we have one thing in common: we love where we live.

Imagine your front yard facing a road, and across that road is a field. And in that field are deer and sandhill cranes feeding in harmony, and there's a beautiful summer sunset every night for you to enjoy. Now imagine that beautiful view turning into a literal sea of solar panels, for as far as the eye can see, surrounded by a "10 foot high chainlink fence with barbed wire on top" (according to Benton Solar). This is my home's future if this solar field plan proceeds. Some of my neighbors will be surrounded on 3 sides of their property by solar panels. This is not right. I live here not because I enjoy driving my kid 45 min to soccer practice. I live here for the view and for the peace and mental well being living away from infrastructure provides me and my family. (Please see the attached picture of my current view that would be entirely filled with solar panels and fencing with barbed wire)

I am concerned what this proposed solar field project will do to property values in the area. When I queried Benton Solar with this concern, they mentioned they did a study that found it did not lower homes values. This is a biased study completed by the party that stands to gain financially from this project and is completely unacceptable. There are studies that state that homes within 0.5 miles from a solar farm suffer a 1.5% decrease in value. Our home is the width of a county road away. How will this affect our home's resale? Currently our home is being taxed by Benton County at a value of close to 1 million dollars. My neighbors house sold a couple of years ago for 1.2 million dollars. Who would choose to spend a million dollars on a home that has a view of a sea of solar panels? Some of the large private landowners that have come to an agreement with Benton Solar no longer live in the area and their homes don't border the fields. They lose nothing and gain monetarily, while we lose both our way of life and the value of our homes against our will.

I am a proponent of renewable energy. I want to save this planet, but I feel it can be done in a more responsible, mutually beneficial way with respect for those that it affects directly and negatively. Solar fields can avoid residential neighborhoods all together. Solar companies can put up attractive fencing that does not obstruct views and build berms and plant mature trees that hide the solar fields from view. They can create migratory routes for animals between the panels. They can increase the empty space between our home and where the panels begin. No home should be surrounded on 3 sides by panels. Native grasses and flowers can be planted between the rows of panels to control run off, improve soil quality and provide habitat for pollinators. I request that some measure be guaranteed that these items will be done and maintained throughout the entire life of the project. This means watering trees and replanting them when they die with the same size tree. If this project is granted, those of us who are losing so much, deserve something, even if it is just a row of trees so that we can pretend it's not there.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns.

Sincerely,
Leigh Rusin
600 75th Ave NE
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379

The photos in this letter were all taken at our home. Please see the following page for additional photos.

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Matt Braem <braem1211@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 27, 2025 7:38 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Benton county solar project

You don't often get email from braem1211@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Matt Braem
41 75th ave ne sauk rapids mn 56379
320-761-9609

I am email you in regards to the benton county solar project that I was informed of by my neighbors. Well this project doesn't directly effect me it's still close enough for me to have some questions and concerns.

First off how was the path for all this chosen because from the way the map looks to me it's a very random location. Off all the area in benton county this is the best area and place for all this nonsense I really doubt it i think there's a better place somewhere else.

Second does the county and my township stand to profit off of this or is this a private party that make the money. Who is generating the power and who is it being sold or given to. Who is responsible for the upkeep of this project when completed is the burden put on the county and township?

I would also like to understand why all this what looks to be farm land is now going to sit ungrowable while lots of solar panels sit on top of it and is unusable because of it.

I would also like to understand the effects of this solar project on my neighbors and on my real estate values because anyone coming in to this area is going to see that eye sore and not want to live next to it which drives our values down. Because as a potential buyer looking to build or by in the proposed area of the project i would be looking elsewhere and not want to be anywhere near this.

Is the area going to be secured to prevent potential vandalism to the site and who is responsible for the upkeep of the security?

I understand the reasoning behind the project for the need for renewable energy but the technology is not there for storage of this energy when captured and the effects to the land and animal life as well as my neighbors and my effects of it and what happens when this all doesn't work out and all the money wasted on this project needs to be recovered is the county and township or the state going to be on the hook for the bill?

I think there's are many other area in the county where this project should take place just not here. To me the technology isn't there and I believe the state is wasting a lot of money on all these solar fields just so that the big companies can profit from the potential gains while the rest of us have to just deal with this. I understand that there is probably nothing we can do and this is just a formality and a process that the state has to do to get public feedback that they will ignore.

I DO NOT WANT TO SEE THIS PROJECT IN MY AREA PLEASE FIND OTHER AREAS

Thanks
Matt Braem

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Michael Bartowsheski <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Saturday, January 18, 2025 6:11 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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Do not select links or open attachments unless verified. Report all suspicious emails to Minnesota IT Services Security Operations Center.

January 18, 2025 @ 12:10pm
I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I urge you to support the Benton Solar project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line and approve the project permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

By supporting Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line route, we can unlock a unique opportunity for our community to receive millions of dollars in additional tax revenue over the project's lifetime. This revenue can be used to address the needs and priorities set by our local government, such as improving our public schools, maintaining our roads, undertaking special projects and fostering the growth of our community and local businesses.

In addition, supporting renewable energy within our community allows us to safeguard landowners' rights and empower local citizens to have a say in how their land is used. Moreover, it encourages the production of homegrown energy, contributing to a sustainable future.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Mr. Michael Bartowsheski
41 3rd Ave NE Apt: 102,
Saint Cloud, MN 56304
mjbartowsheski@gmail.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Michael <heynash62@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 3:56 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Benton County Solar Project/Blackrock

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From the beginning.

NextEra calling themselves, the "Benton County Solar Project", when in reality they a subsidiary of the company BlackRock. Yes, that Blackrock, a company who deprives neighborhoods of housing by buying up homes at higher prices for investment properties, so first-time homeowners and minorities are shut out of that market place and consequently are forced to live in a perpetual potter's field of rent, never being able to own their own homes while BlackRock profits off the backs of less fortunate people simply wanting a home for their families. Blackrock is the company that has been sued by states for violating mutable consumer protection laws now wants to destroy our home values and our environment to profit a few. Your honor do not allow them to do this to us!

Let's continue with their lying...

NextEra never sent out notices of the meeting to be held on January 14th as they were required to do. We know this because our mail is monitored due to some theft of checks from our mailbox last year, so, along with countless neighbors claiming they never received a notice as well, I believe them. We ourselves found out about the meeting a few days before through a neighbor who happened to stumble upon the notice from an outside source.

While at the meeting on January 14th (that only happened after a complaint was filed earlier) we were met with no fewer than thirty employees of NextEra including their attorney, supposed experts, county officials in the hopes of finding wedges in our complaints. Throughout the meeting they did nothing but lie, out right and through omission of what the extent of what they were actually planning. I believe through their actions; they thought we were on a need-to-know basis, and they were simply rolling us over and moving forward. NextEra had a supposed "environmental expert" (I believe that was you Logan Hicks) that didn't seem to have knowledge of environmental impacts of these sorts of projects, information easily found online with a simple search. Multiple things including creating heat deserts etc., or the likelihood of severe storms that this area is prone to, including large hailstorms. Any reasonable individual could conclude if a storm could takeout windows, destroy shingles and tin roofs on barns it could easily

enough take out solar panels. The only difference is if you lose windows or the roof of your home it doesn't leach toxic materials and heavy metals into the soil and surrounding wetlands, streams and ground water etc... NextEra had a battery expert as well who didn't seem to be able to answer questions about batteries and storage, but then how could he as this project NextEra is pushing is experimental. With the amount of storage required it would be like having approximately five thousand Tesla cars piled up next to neighborhoods with small children. Our children. What could possibly go wrong? Nothing like the current fires in California when the battery-operated cars went up in flames and polluted everything in the area. Or cargo ships of battery-operated cars spontaneously catch on fire while sinking to the bottom of the ocean polluting on the way down, and years after as well. Now image five thousand batteries going up at one time that the supposed battery expert from NextEra in a moment of moral clarity said was a possibility. The federal government has put a halt to all these proposed solar projects on all federal land due to the impact on the areas deeming it an unreliable source of energy that destroys the natural beauty of the area and the amount of area it actually takes up. Compounded with the threats of the future impact when toxic materials are introduced into the environment due to natural events or aged out panels are introduced into landfills. Then there's the county board, our county board! who took an oath to represent on the side of the people who actually live in the county, a county official told me to my face, they were told to sit down and shut up when this project was brought to them from the state, finding out later they were involved from the beginning violating their own county restrictions that states "no project will be allowed to proceed if it has a negative effect on local homeowners", so I guess the two hundred grand NextEra promised the county was enough to violate and relinquish all reasonability's to the residents of the area. Then there's the smugness of the NextEra people telling homeowners they should have known better then to buy a house next to the project! These people have owned their homes long before these jack wagons came to destroy their way of life. And destroy it for what!? So a few greedy individuals can add a digit to their bottom line. NextEra admitted, I believe in a slipup, they don't even have a buyer for the product they hope to produce, so they wish to upend our way of life for speculation. This strongarmed approach sounds vaguely familiar, played out countless times throughout history with the end result always being regrets. This project will destroy our property values and our enjoyment of life throughout this entire area.

Your honor do not allow them to do this to us!

We are in pursuit of investigative reporters, local/national news stations. We have contacted state representatives and have started a legal defense fund. We have passed out hundreds of flyers to local homeowners who were never notified and are in shock that something as destructive as this would be allowed to happen.

My request to you is simply this. Please hear what we are saying. Listen deeply to our concerns. and read the trans srips from the meeting on January 14th. As tempting as it sounds when they shout "clean energy" this is anything but. We live in this area. We are conservationists/environmentalists by choice and way of life. We all believe in the

protection and caring for the environment, after all, this is our environment. They do not live here, they do not care, they live well outside the area and have no concern if they destroy our way of life. If they are allowed to do that to us, they will leave us with the consequences and simply move onto their next planed destruction.

Bottom line is this. We will see you in August, with cameras rolling, armed with facts, knowledge and common sense.

Your Honor, we will also have copies of these emails for you in August that were submitted on January 31st, 2025.

As I have little trust at this time you will receive them.

All the very best,

Michael Odenthal

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: eera.admin_no_reply@state.mn.us
Sent: Monday, January 27, 2025 2:18 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Public Comment re: Benton Solar Project

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Benton Solar Project

Submitter Name: Johnson, Michelle, M

Submitter Email: mj@uslfreight.com

Submitter Telephone: (320) 250-5736

Comment:

Good morning, I attended the meeting held at the Government Center regarding the Benton Solar Project. When we built here, we built because of the beautiful country we got to view out every window we would look out. The peaceful quiet of the outside and a perfect place to raise our family. We were never told in a few short years we would be surrounded by solar panels and our new view would be fields of humming panels with blinking lights (yes they hum and yes there are blinking lights). We also chose to move out here for health reasons - I suffer from life halting migraines which tend to be exasperated by city noises. Since moving to the country it has decreased their appearance. While NextEra claims these panels are silent, I went to a local field that has them already installed and wasn't able to sit next to them longer than 15 minutes before a migraine set in. These being installed in fields that will in essence completely surround our neighborhood will impact my health in a negative way, a way that I literally moved here to avoid. I would also like to bring up the impact that these fields would have on our water table. In the spring many of our surrounding fields are flooded - they dry out as these very farmers start irrigating their crops. As these farmers would no longer be irrigating and there are no other uses to bring the water table down not only will these panels be "in water" (not sure how well electricity works with water in your world, but in mine - I've never seen a good thing come of it), but our basements will flood. We have been in a drought the last 3 years, however normal years generally has our sub-pumps humming every spring until those farmers start watering their crops. With that no longer happening, our land, our homes, will be under water. What will happen when our neighborhood pond that they also plan to put panels around floods as well? Half of our property becomes a squooshy bog. I realize the impact of our home values isn't deemed as a thing that is worth looking at, however when we spoke to a few realtors their answer was simply this. "I've never had anyone said, find me a nice house with a big yard surrounded by solar panels." Had this information been disclosed to us when we purchased this piece of land, we never would have chosen here to build our home and our lives. We have invested thousands of dollars into making this piece of property our beautiful home in the country (not in the panels). We do a lot of gardening, solar panels not only produce hotspots but we won't be able to hide from them as again we will be surrounded in them. This affects our food source, our affordable way to feed our family in an economy that is so insane right now that we would starve without it. We don't know what future health

risks there are with panels because there simply hasn't been enough time for research to know, but I can tell you that the health risks to that land is something that has been researched and it is detrimental. The decommissioning of those panels isn't a clean de-install - those panels break and that glass doesn't get recovered. It leaves the ground un-farmable and any chemicals then are leached into the ground and ultimately our drinking water. They claim they leave the land better then when they find it, however it has been reported untrue. We have also been watching the fires in California closely. There was a report of a large fire that had caught on fire at the Moss Landing battery plant. This is unrelated to the California Fires. They don't have a way to contain the the clouds of black smoke, they can't extinguish the fires they have to let them burn out. They had to issue evacuations orders and residents were told to close their windows and doors and turn off their ventilation system to avoid exposure - this doesn't sound like a "completely safe and it won't affect anyone" scenario. They are still monitoring the air quality. These battery fires can last for hours and emit toxic hydrogen flouride gasses. We LIVE here - this is OUR home, these are OUR lives that are being put in jeopardy and no one appears to asking us if we were ok with this. These farmers don't live here, they won't be looking at it, they won't be dealing with the environmental or health issues - they don't care and neither does NextEra - they are NOT in our community, not one of them even lives in the state. Please consider these some of the reasons to deny the installation of these solar panels in this location. Thank you, Michelle Johnson

Submit Date: 01/27/2025 08:17 PM

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Patrick Arnold <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Thursday, January 23, 2025 10:45 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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January 23, 2025 @ 04:45pm
I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I urge you to support the Benton Solar project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line and approve the project permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

By supporting Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line route, we can unlock a unique opportunity for our community to receive millions of dollars in additional tax revenue over the project's lifetime. This revenue can be used to address the needs and priorities set by our local government, such as improving our public schools, maintaining our roads, undertaking special projects and fostering the growth of our community and local businesses.

In addition, supporting renewable energy within our community allows us to safeguard landowners' rights and empower local citizens to have a say in how their land is used. Moreover, it encourages the production of homegrown energy, contributing to a sustainable future.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Patrick Arnold
2995 Quail Rd,
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379

patarnold1950@gmail.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Pete Cosgrove <team@peak4.co>
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2025 10:09 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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January 18, 2025 @ 04:09am

I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I urge you to support the Benton Solar project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line and approve the project permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

By supporting Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line route, we can unlock a unique opportunity for our community to receive millions of dollars in additional tax revenue over the project's lifetime. This revenue can be used to address the needs and priorities set by our local government, such as improving our public schools, maintaining our roads, undertaking special projects and fostering the growth of our community and local businesses.

In addition, supporting renewable energy within our community allows us to safeguard landowners' rights and empower local citizens to have a say in how their land is used. Moreover, it encourages the production of homegrown energy, contributing to a sustainable future.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Pete Cosgrove
9049 75TH AVE NE,
Foley, MN 56329
petercosgrove101@gmail.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Ronald Oelrich <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Friday, January 24, 2025 7:25 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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January 24, 2025 @ 11:57am

I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I want to emphasize the significance of supporting the Benton Solar project's solar, energy storage, and transmission lines. I urge you to approve the project permits so our community can benefit from them.

Supporting Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system and associated transmission line gives us a unique opportunity to generate millions of dollars in additional tax revenue over the project's lifetime. This revenue, based on the needs and decisions of our local government, can play a vital role in supporting our public schools, maintaining our roads, funding special projects, and fostering the growth and vitality of our community and local businesses.

Furthermore, by embracing renewable energy within our community, we can protect landowners' rights and empower local citizens to have a voice in determining how their land is used. This support also encourages homegrown energy production, paving the way for a sustainable future.

I cannot stress the importance of acting now.

Together, we can shape a brighter future for our community's economic growth and environmental well-being.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
Ronald Oelrich
11611 Business Park Blvd N,

Champlin, MN 55316
rpo@eganco.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Sarah Mindeman <sarah_mindeman@hotmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, January 26, 2025 9:39 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Comment Regarding the Benton Solar Project Docket No. IP7115/GS-23-423; ESS-24-283; TL-23-425

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Logan.m.hicks@state.mn.us

Regarding the Benton Solar Project
Docket No. IP7115/GS-23-423; ESS-24-283; TL-23-425

January 26, 2025

Dear Mr. Logan Hicks, Department of Commerce Environmental Review Manager and Others Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the installation of solar panels in residential areas proposed in the Benton Solar Project, Sauk Rapids area. While solar energy presents certain benefits, I believe that the negative implications for our local community—particularly concerning residential neighborhoods, local wildlife, and property values—must be carefully considered.

Firstly, the aesthetic impact of large solar panel installations can significantly alter the character and appeal of residential neighborhoods. Many residents choose to live in this area of Benton County primarily for its natural beauty and tranquil atmosphere. The installation of extensive solar arrays would disrupt this landscape with structures that detract from the beautiful green forests and abundant fields.

Secondly, there are considerable ecological concerns associated with placing solar panels in residential areas. Wildlife habitats can be encroached upon or destroyed by large-scale installations. Fields of solar panels would cause dramatic disruption and threaten to undermine the biodiversity within our local ecosystems. Our area is abundant in herds of deer, busy pollinators, and stunning sandhill cranes with wetlands abounding. Introducing dense panels would create barriers that prevent wildlife movement and migration patterns essential for their survival. Looking at the map of the proposed project, you can see that the migration of these species within their local wildlife habitat would be completely cut off and interrupted. This would be a most horrible tragedy.

Lastly, the potential impact on property resale value cannot be overlooked. Prospective homebuyers often consider various factors when making purchasing decisions; among these factors are neighborhood aesthetics and environmental considerations. Homes located near industrial-style solar

farms would face reduced desirability due to perceived hazard risk or visual blight—resulting in lower market values compared with similar properties not adjacent to such developments.

In conclusion, while renewable energy is an important goal for our future sustainability efforts—and I appreciate initiatives aimed at reducing carbon footprints—the implementation should occur thoughtfully without compromising community integrity or wildlife conservation efforts here in Benton County. It is vital we explore alternative locations better suited for large-scale solar infrastructure that would minimize adverse effects on both residents' quality of life as well as ecological health. Other places perhaps more suited for this infrastructure would be the airport, atop parking structures or buildings, or near the highway. Thank you for considering my perspective on this significant issue affecting our community's future.

Sincerely,

Sarah Feierabend & Family
Sarah_Mindeman@hotmail.com
430 75th Ave NE
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379



Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: eera.admin_no_reply@state.mn.us
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 2025 12:54 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Public Comment re: Benton Solar Project

Benton Solar Project

Submitter Name: Scott Myers

Submitter Email: myerssg@hotmail.com

Submitter Telephone: (320) 492-1135

Comment:

To begin, this is the first time I have heard of this project. An official mail notification to the households referenced in Appendix F should have been a requirement and notifications should be required to this list as to ongoing updates with this project. We have concerns with the increased traffic on 55th Ave NE as it looks like this is the primary access point for a substantial portion of this project. 55th Ave NE is currently a very narrow road with no shoulders that is already seeing increased truck traffic between Knife River facilities and other trucks. With increased construction traffic and the long term access for the BESS Batteries, this road will become more hazardous. I would suggest that 55th Ave NE be widened and have shoulders added between Hwy 95 and 2nd St. SE. Another road concern is the additional traffic on 2nd St SE from 55th Ave NE to 60th Ave SE. As that electrical substation located near the east end of 2nd St SE grows the traffic load on that section of 2nd St SE will also increase. This street is even narrower than 55th Ave NE and is used by many individuals for walking and there are families with children living along this road and it also has a bus stop for the 57th Ave SE cul-de-sac. This street should also be widened with shoulders, if not widened, a sidewalk or paved trail should be added on the south side of the street to get foot traffic off of that street. In the short time we have lived hear, traffic on both roads has noticeably increased and will only increase more as that substation has ongoing construction and long term maintenance. One last concern is that I could not determine the type of storage to be used in the BESS Batteries. In the event of a battery failure, is there an environmental mitigation plan in place? Different battery types have different failure scenarios and can have different impacts on the surrounding area. Would neighboring residents need to be notified and have mitigation/evacuation plans prepared to deal with such a battery failure? Renewable energy is a worthy cause but we do have some reservations about such a large project nearing a growing population area as well as the resulting loss of active agricultural use land. For long term safety please carefully review the road/street improvements that have been mentioned. Thank you, Scott Myers

Submit Date: 01/30/2025 06:53 PM

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: SirWilliam Blahut <team@speak4.co>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 7:30 AM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: I support Benton Solar

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January 12, 2025 @ 12:40am

I support Benton Solar

Dear MN Public Utilities Commission,

I support Benton Solar and urge you to approve the project's solar, energy storage, and transmission line permits so our community can take advantage of its benefits.

Benton Solar's 100 MW solar site, 100 MW battery energy storage system site, and associated transmission line will bring significant opportunities to Benton County, such as increased tax revenue, predictable, steady, and diversified income for our landowners, and up to approximately 300 construction jobs and long-term jobs that manage and operate Benton Solar—providing more opportunity for our young people to live and work in Benton County. It also helps move our country towards energy independence.

The time to take action is now.

Please approve the Benton Solar permits and support economic development, property owners' rights, and energy independence for Benton County and Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

DOCKET NUMBERS FOR REFERENCE:

Solar: IP7115/GS-23-423

Storage: IP7115/ESS-24-283

Transmission: IP7115/TL-23-425

Sincerely,
SirWilliam Blahut
400 hwy 10 west,
Sartell, MN 56303
williamblahut143@gmail.com

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: eera.admin_no_reply@state.mn.us
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 2:18 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Public Comment re: Benton Solar Project

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Benton Solar Project

Submitter Name: Steve Jurek

Submitter Email: stevejurek66@gmail.com

Submitter Telephone: (320) 267-8588

Comment:

I am opposed to this project. I own property close to the proposed site. This area is beautiful with rolling hills and abundant wildlife. We will be losing farmland that will be replaced with unsightly solar panels. There are many houses within close proximity of the site. Do we know the environmental impact that will occur over the next 20-30 years to the residents? A possible remedial action might be trees and vegetation around the perimeter of the project. I am also concerned about what this project will do to my property value. It certainly won't enhance it and I believe will decrease it.

Submit Date: 01/29/2025 08:18 PM

Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Kotch Egstad, Stacy (DOT)
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 12:02 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: FW: large scale solar benton county

Mr. Hicks,

While this email came to me, it seems to be comments meant for the Benton Solar Project docket?

Because Mr. Oetken asked that these comments be registered, I thought they should be forwarded to you.

Thank you,

Stacy Kotch Egstad

Utility Routing & Siting Coordinator | Office of Land Management

Minnesota Department of Transportation

395 John Ireland Blvd Mailstop 678

St. Paul, MN. 55155

[Large Energy Facility Project Guidance - MnDOT \(state.mn.us\)](https://state.mn.us)



From: steve oetken <steve_oetken@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 10:37 AM
To: Kotch Egstad, Stacy (DOT) <stacy.kotch@state.mn.us>; monika oetken <mloetken@hotmail.com>
Subject: large scale solar benton county

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I am the resident of 5883 tee to green street St Cloud Mn. I have been informed of the proposed Nextra Energy and Benton County effort to install 260,000 solar panels and a lithium battery storage facility near my home. Why do we allow a potential hazard that does not exist now to be built so close to a housing project and public use facility golf course. I and my wife are totally against the project. There is enough land with less impact on the public further away from housing projects, public use facilities, and airports. How does a project like this effect airports flights etc? Please register my objection to the project. I can't see any positive benefit to anyone living anywhere near us. The only benefactors would be the people involved with the project

January 31, 2025

Logan Hicks
Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
St. Paul, MN 55101

Dear Mr. Logan Hicks, Judge McKenzie and all others influential in the decision making process regarding the Benton County Solar project,

I am writing to you with deep opposition to the proposed Benton County Solar large energy power generating plant, high voltage battery energy storage system and transmission lines. I have many concerns in regard to the origin of the project, the impact of the noise with the combined systems and the construction phase, the risks of a BESS system within a residential area, the risks of a large scale solar field in a residential area, the identified risks to house these systems in Benton County, an appropriate plan for first responders in regards to training and equipment, substation infrastructure risks, environmental concerns, habitat disruption, encroachment of natural areas, insurance ramifications, property values, property tax impacts and overall injustice and danger of this system within a residential area. I have outlined my concerns in greater detail in the following pages. I hope detailed investigation will ensue on our behalf and that our community response is not used as fuel to provide NextEra Energy an opportunity to manufacture superficial responses to that propel this project forward. These systems do not belong in residential areas where their impact will be devastating, dangerous and do not support a risk per benefit calculation. I hope in the examination process there will be thought as to what this would feel like if it was your neighborhood or loved ones. Mr. Hicks, you revealed in our phone conversation you had driven by the site just once prior to the January 14th meeting when it was likely already dark. I implore you and anyone involved in making this decision to do a second assessment with the DNR and US Fish and Wildlife Service or Environmental Protection Agency in person here where you can properly assess the devastating impact these systems would have. Historically wars were waged in the fight to protect rights and land. Come see what will fight tirelessly to protect. See you in August.....

Respectfully, hopefully and sincerely,

Tamara Sell

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT:

NextEra Energy went to a few of the surrounding landowners whom were primarily trust holders in 2022 to acquire land leases for large plots to place solar panels on to support a large scale power generating plant in conjunction with a high voltage battery storage system and transmission lines for both the solar and battery systems. At this time NextEra Energy went to the county to introduce the idea and present the \$200,000 tax incentive which at the meeting the county was unclear how that would benefit the county as it is at their discretion. From the tax base we are currently at I am skeptical as to how these minimal funds would be allocated. We were told at the meeting from Benton county that the state came to them and introduced the idea strongly insinuating this was out of their control when in reality on September 6, 2022 the Benton County Commission comprised of Jared J. Gapinski, Steve Heinen, Scott Johnson, Ed Popp, and Beth Schlangen with NextEra Energy (aka "Benton" County Solar) and progressed on a regular basis since that time with the Benton County Planning and Zoning Department and the Benton County Board. The land leases signed by the participating landowners were signed in November of 2022. NextEra Energy held a landowner open house on August 14, 2024 with the participating landowners and landowners adjacent to the project. To date I have heard limited if any of the areas adjacent to and affected by the project aware of this project until late 2024. I am saddened, disappointed and frankly shocked that there was not more of an effort on behalf of the county to create awareness equal to the impact of this project.

MITIGATING AESTHETICS:

The proposal outlines wire fencing with barbed wire elevations. This would only add to the eyesore that will already exist with this project. Our views will have the ambience of a federal prison. Common mitigating practices include adjusting panel height, panel orientation, anti-glare coatings, landscaping, vegetation buffers, restoring lay down areas that will house large pieces of equipment, ways to mitigate fire risk under and around panels, pollinating possibilities for aesthetics in panel fields...etc etc. What are the exact particulars of NextEra's aesthetics plan? They are not clearly stated in the permit application.

NOISE:

The noise from an active work site involving large cranes and other large construction equipment and the permanent noise from the inverters and transformers that run the panels. This will have a noticeable impact here in particular because of the extremely peaceful conditions that exist currently. The standard noise barometer for these projects is "backyard noise". We do not have "backyard noise". To go from intense quiet to this consistent forever noise will be very impactful for us all and all of the species that live peacefully here. It states in the file that the system proposed will run at 20-65 during the day and 20-55 at night. Noise standards site this level of noise as equivalent of from moderate traffic to a vacuum cleaner. That is a VAST change from our current conditions not to mention the construction phase which will average 101 for over a year. The project outlines hours of operation for construction as "daylight hours". Daylight hour averages in the summer in Benton County is 14 hours 50 minutes. It is also mentioned "daylight hours to the extent practicable" which means they can work whenever they want essentially.

BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM (BESS) RISKS-

The batteries proposed in this project are lithium-ion batteries. Lithium-ion batteries can be triggered by excessive humidity, extreme swings in temperature, DUST, faulty installation, power surges or physical damage including and not limited to storms. When ignited they release toxic airborne gases and pollute the soil and water with thermal runaway. These fires cannot be extinguished by water as evidenced by the fire in California that burned for 5 days and the most recent BESS fire Thursday January 16th that affected 1,200 people with the same safety guarantees we have on the table.

The BESS codes currently have no standard grid codes that would ensure safe and reliable interactions with the master system making this process even more dangerous to malfunction.

In the community meeting NextEra Energy stated that the labor force that would expedite the installation would be contracted out and that they would merely be the general contractor. This would remove them from the hiring process and the quality control of the labor force on the ground installing this structure which is essential to the safety of its existence. What qualifications will be in place for hiring this project out?

The substation located on this project site has already shown it can be compromised as it exploded due to a conductor short in the system according to the Vice President of East Central Energy Andy Olson with whom I spoke January 17th (video will be provided electronically). He also provided information regarding the area of coverage for a 100 W large scale power generating plant. The percentage of usage accessible in this area with the site projections according to Mr. Olson is merely 25% which dilutes the risk per benefit calculation significantly.

The current percentage of large scale power generating plants paired with BESS (battery energy storage systems) is only 13% making this a project within a residential area uncertain in terms of safety.

According to the pamphlet distributed at the January 14th meeting regarding page 2 paragraph three bullet point 4 “Overall, the current body of evidence is insufficient to establish a cause an effect relationship between EMF and adverse health effects.” The current body of evidence is reflective of the newness of these systems rolled out in tandem (battery and solar) with the transmission lines to accompany them in residential areas. The universal support for renewable energy and the time required to prove people, environments, animals and ecosystems are at grave risk of being collateral damage. NextEra Energy responded to RMF concerns in their proposal as such “Applicant **EXPECTS** that EMF levels would dissipate to an **ACCEPTABLE LEVEL** before reaching residents”. This statement alone provides evidence there is no guarantee of our safety and we are indeed collateral damage. The potential effects of this experiment on our families are horrifyingly unacceptable. The effects of RMF exposure are inconclusive at best and verify these systems do not belong in neighborhoods.

The battery life of lithium-ion batteries is 5-15 years. What is the plan for disposal and resupplying the system. Will the residents be subject to another construction period of any magnitude at that time? What are the removal risks in the disposal phase of removing the expired lithium ion batteries? Where is the proposed recycling area and what are the risks and evaluations for the large influx of toxic waste? I am additionally concerned that this component was not addressed in the overall permit application as the reach and risk will reach outside of the proposed parameters.

SOLAR PANEL RISKS-

The impacts of this large solar field and the intended future large scale solar fields throughout Benton County will have an impact on food and crop production driving up food prices. The panels will negatively impact surrounding crops by reducing sunlight that impacts full sun crops.

This area is seasonally dry and requires consistent irrigation. The panels will add additional strain to the water supply with the regular cleaning and maintenance required to maintain efficiency.

Solar panels kill birds. There is no disputing that. They mistake solar panels for water and this field has a high probability of collision with the large number of panels and large area they will cover. We share this land with many beautiful and rare birds. It would be tragic to discount the impact of this project on thousands of these birds.

BENTON COUNTY HAZARD IDENTIFIED RISKS -

One of the risks stated in many publications and formats is that this puts us as a county at risk for cyber-attacks. This is also noted in our Benton County Hazard Mitigation Plan in accordance with the Hazard Mitigation Act of 2000 mandate that requires updates every 5 years.

As noted in the Benton County Mitigation Act Benton County has elevated risk of fires that “have plagued Benton County through its existence” according to James R Russell with the Department of Public Safety and Christine Stack Director of Mitigation Division for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Benton County risk manager. The county is outlined as having elevated risk of lightning, wind, hail, tornado, severe thunderstorms, heavy snow, ice storms, blizzard conditions, excessive heat, excessive cold in addition to the elevated fire risk which are all substation triggers.

There is a pipeline(s) that operates in Benton County that I do not see addressed in the proposal. Is there a risk assessment to operate near the oil line(s)? Have the pipeline operators been connected to this project with agreed upon information in regard to safety zones and regulations? This again would be concerning to me as decision makers in regard to intent and protection over the project that will wear your stamp of approval.

There are only annual safety checks planned for this system. Given the elevated risk of this area and the current infrastructure's reliability this seems dangerously minimal. It is not stated if these checks will be manual or virtual. The standard for safety checks for these systems is also a post storm which we have many of. Will there be someone trained and qualified living in the direct area to respond to a post storm situation or any emergency that arises? There is no mention in the permit application of any cleaning or maintenance. The standard for these systems is biannually.

The city emergency manager, fire department and public works conducted a risk assessment in which they highlighted the following as risks specific to Benton County.

Natural Gas Odorizing station - Damage to this system would interrupt natural gas supply and would be a risk due to fire or explosion.

Federated/Cap Trico Propane Bulk Fuel storage – Leaks, severe weather and terrorism activity would result in potential explosion or fire that “could create the need to evacuate 50% of the civilian population in our city”.

FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT:

What type of training will the local fire departments and first responders go through? What will the continual training look like? How often will continual training occur. How will new fire fighters be brought up to speed. To appropriately train these individuals they would all have to go through extensive training on electricity, thermal runaway, ventilation, hazardous gas, battery chemistry and hazards, solar fire suppression, shutoff devices, photovoltaic systems, high voltage awareness, alternating current versus direct current systems, understanding CO2 and dry chemical agents, gas leak awareness, hazardous gas awareness, ventilation requirements etc etc. This seems like an entirely new job category and responsibility. There will be costs for the proper equipment required. Class D fire extinguishers for metal fires, suppression tools, PPE for electrical fires (gloves, face shields, flame resistant clothing and all the additional BESS gear) self contained breathing apparatus, etc etc. Who will pay for all of these components? If an emergency happens to either of these systems, they will need to respond and react quickly.

INSURANCE:

In speaking with several insurance companies and agents it was brought to my attention that the project with its particulars will put us in a “hazardous exposure” category that can greatly impact our insurance. Insurers can raise premiums, limit coverage or withdraw coverage all together further proving the point this project is not safe for us or our homes. This information comes from several carriers I contacted (names can be provided) as well as my insurance agent of 25 years. Jay and Evan Larson owners of Advance Insurance Agency in Edina, MN. In addition to that piece, I wonder if Benton County also has specific insurance requirements for properties near renewable energy installations or high-risk infrastructure. Would that not be the final kick in the teeth from our county representatives?

PROPERTY VALUES:

It was presented to us that there are no notable effects to property value with the project proposed. According to live agents with boots on the ground right here in all facets of the real-estate market, that statement is false. This is something as homeowners I feel strongly should be able to be proven and guaranteed as factual prior to permit consideration. We met with and phoned multiple real estate agents, all highly successful and experienced some well versed in rural and some in urban areas and conclusively they all agreed the property value for home owners in the site view, adjacent to or even just in the county would have significant decreases in their property value. Public concerns in safety, aesthetic, potential for further development (which has already been referenced in the proposal), noise, increased cost for insurance and the already high property taxes in place. This is just another negative impact on the community and homeowners. Also evidenced by President Trump who has paused wind energy projects due to the expense, danger to birds and habitat, equipment purchases that come 80% from China and inefficiency are highly similar to the proposed systems but less dangerous than the BESS and solar field projects. The BESS and solar fields are much more invasive and expensive. “Drill baby drill” I believe Mr. Trump said. We did not get acquisition information about the materials for this project, other than that they would be purchased prior to the permit approval which is insulting to the process the state has proposed that appears to give us an objectionable voice that will be heard. Either they have a guarantee we are unaware of or a strong implied indication of permit approval. This is a concerning piece in my opinion.

PROPERTY TAX RAMIFICATIONS:

According to the existing statistics on property tax (pre and post large scale solar field and BESS system installation) these systems can increase property taxes through perceived increase in land valuations with expensive houses in and around the county. This was not addressed or outlined in the meeting or proposal. How will this affect our taxes? Will there be a tax exemption for residences within and adjacent to the site or within the county in general over and above the minimal \$200,000 tax benefit from NextEra Energy that it was not specified how would be allocated. Given the high tax rate already in existence this allocation is slight and insulting in comparison to the funds the homeowners who sold out their neighbors and community will be receiving. I would like to see what it cost for them to turn over in such a horrifying way to those around them. We as a county are mindful and legally regulated to get permits for sheds, fences and anything that would negatively impact the homeowners around us and our environment. It is incomprehensible to me that this could be as far in the process as it is given the hypocrisy of our community rules and regulations.

SUBSTATION INFRASTRUCTURE RISK:

The existing substation has already been compromised by a conduction error that caused the hub to explode. According to all literature related to substation safety fails and experts in the union who work on substations (1 from New York, 1 from Manhattan and one from Minnesota) substations rarely experience a short circuit unless there is an insulation failure, equipment malfunction, poor maintenance or external factors like weather which has already been identified as a risk factor throughout Benton County. We have been assured in the proposal that these systems are designed with protective devices, circuit breakers, and relays to detect and isolate faults quickly to mitigate damage and ensure reliability but even in the exact county of the proposed project this actual event has occurred, and the result was an explosion (video provided electronically). The proposed substation is located in direct proximity to the compromised infrastructure. I cannot imagine the catastrophic damage if the BESS system was in operation.

Benton County has an additional risk exposure in that we are located in range of Northern Metals which is a metal scrap recycler in nearby Monticello. Northern Metals has had a long history of infractions of industrial pollution as noted by the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The company has been shut down and fined in random yet frequent intervals beyond possible guarantee of control, putting the community in immediate danger if the system could be compromised in any way. In May the substation located on the project site was again compromised. According to the Great River Energy article dated March 17, 2020 residual smog hovered over the substation for over a week stating "the smog was so thick the employees could not perform a visual inspection due to health concerns". The substation had to be de-energized as a safety precaution to avoid a fire. They also stated that when the fire stopped burning the employees had to "figure out" how to clean the soot off the transformer, breaker, line and other critical equipment. Mary Koepke, leader of substation apparatus at Great River Energy, said "substations and equipment are designed to withstand naturally occurring elements. The panels and BESS system are susceptible to triggers but this wasn't regular dust – it stuck to the equipment. This was unusual because the equipment is designed such that rainwater and wind will naturally clean them but that changes when you get an unusual type of dust" Another example of the vulnerability of these and particularly this substation to the existing conditions and elevated risk of danger to our community.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS...HABITAT DISRUPTION...ENCROACHMENT OF NATURAL AREAS-

Upon speaking with Logan Hicks our contact at the state, it was revealed that the site assessment used in this permit process was provided by NextEra Energy. There was no secondary assessment done. Relying on statistics would not be sufficient for the implementation of such a vast disruption to animal and plant species which include long lists of special concern species, threatened species and also endangered species. The location of the site and development area alone would have significant and permanently devastating impact by this project not to mention the wider reach of migration paths and habitat changes that would spread to undetermined lengths. Any mitigation response to continuing with potential risk to these species would not counterbalance the risk to any and all of these protected species.

ANIMAL SPECIES

Cerulean Warbler -special concern species

Lark Sparrow – special concern species

Loggerhead shrike – ENDANGERED SPECIES (breeding noted in Sherburne and Rice County, seen in Benton County summer of 2022, Stearns County fall of 2022 as shown in the Seasonal Report Archive journal of the Minnesota Ornithologist's Union)

Peregrine falcon – special concern species (high count 5 adult and 4 young in nest box at Great River Energy)

Purple martin – special concern species

Red-shouldered hawk – special concern species

Yellow Rail – special concern species

Plains Pocket Mouse - special concern species (located in Benton County per the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources map)

Blandings Turtle – threatened species (Due to their inability to recover from catastrophic events that reduce their population, low mobility and low reproductive potential this species is threatened in Minnesota. They are found in Benton County according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources map. We have seen this turtle near the pond in back of my house across from the site.)

Gopher snake – special concern species

Regal Fritillary – special concern species (located in Benton County per the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources map)

Whitney's Underwing - special concern species

American Eel – special concern species (located in Benton County per the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources map)

Creek Heelsplitter – special concern species (located in Benton County per the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources map)

Black Sandshell – special concern species (located in Benton County per the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources map)

EAGLES:

There are many bald eagles in and around this area. We regularly (not intermittently or occasionally) see many eagles in and around the project area. There are 4 visible eagles nests in and adjacent to that are merely the nests one can see without navigating the wooded areas and the areas by the river. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act prohibits anyone from disturbing any bald or golden eagle dead or alive. Regulations define “disturb” as anything to agitate or bother an eagle to a degree that causes it injury, decrease its productivity by interfering with normal breeding, feeding or sheltering behavior. As defined by law disturbance to eagles may be caused by removing eagle habitat including breeding, foraging and sheltering habitat. These eagles are seen flying over the site area and eating carcasses on the road. See attachment photo of a large bald eagle nesting in the tree directly across from our home and directly adjacent to the proposed site.

PLANT SPECIES:

1. Blunt Sedge – special concern
2. Bog Bluegrass – threatened
3. Butternut – ENDANGERED (These trees have a potential to occur in the site and are on a state moratorium from being harvested. Butternut is located in Benton County per the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources map)
4. Clinton’s Bulrush – threatened
5. Drummond’s Campion – special concern
6. Hill’s Thistle – special concern
7. Kinnikinnick Dewberry – special concern
8. Old Field Toadflax – special concern
9. Tubercled Rein Orchid – threatened
10. Vermont Bristle Berry – special concern











Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)

From: Tammy Biery <tambiery@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2025 3:59 PM
To: Hicks, Logan (He/Him/His) (COMM)
Subject: Comments

You don't often get email from tambiery@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Do not select links or open attachments unless verified. Report all suspicious emails to Minnesota IT Services Security Operations Center.

Logan,

I would like to share my comments about the proposed solar farm near my home in Benton County - the Benton Solar project.

My concerns about the project include:

The changes to the environment/community. We live in a rural area with nature all around us. I love where I live because there's wildlife living here with us. I am concerned that the solar farm will affect the wildlife in our area - from the eagles to the coyotes, to the rabbits and deer... how will an industrial solar farm affect them?

I am also concerned about the changes in the wind patterns and drifting in the winter that the panels will cause. There's already a strong wind drifting snow across county road 25 and I am concerned that this will get worse with the farm.

While the topsoil on the farm fields appear to be sandy, there is a layer of clay a few feet below the surface. With many of the farm fields being irrigated, will the lack of irrigation change the water table?

I am concerned about the solar farm being so close to the airport. Will a study be performed to ensure the reflection of the panels will not disturb pilots trying to land? There are people of all skill levels flying planes at the St. Cloud Airport.

I am concerned about the value of my home. While at the meeting on the 14th, we heard about how the county will benefit, the economic development impact, etc. but there was no mention of the benefit to me as a neighbor to the solar farm.

I am concerned about my health. I already deal with a number of health issues, including tinnitus. Humming from the solar farm will only further aggravate this condition, not to mention the toll it will take on my mental health.

At the session on January 14th, I was dismayed that none of the land owners spoke in favor of this project. What have they learned since starting the process that kept them from advocating for the solar farm?

Will trees be cut down to make room for the solar farm? To maintain air quality, we need trees to do their job in the ecosystem!

I don't understand why the solar farm needs to be near houses. A mile down the road, there's open farm land that is not adjacent to a neighborhood. That seems more appropriate. We should not have to endure such a drastic change from rolling farm fields to industrial solar farms. If the farm must go in, then I would expect the setbacks to be adjusted away from our neighborhood and proper, mature landscaping and burms to be used to keep the natural look we have grown to love in our rural community.

Sincerely,

Tammy Biery
7558 R Mitchel Court NE
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379
320-493-8837