

Oral Public Meeting Comments Received on the
Scope of the Environmental Assessment for the
Solway Solar Project
Docket Nos. GS-24-309

Public Meetings

1. December 18, 2024 – Virtual, On-Line Meeting, 6:00 p.m.
 - No oral comments.
2. December 19, 2024 – Solway, Minnesota, 6:00 p.m.
 - Three individuals asking questions.

1 SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 24-309

2 Webex - December 18, 2024 - 6:00 p.m.

3 BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

4 AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

5
6 In the Matter of the Application of Otter Tail Power
7 Company for a Site Permit for the up to 66 MW Solway
8 Solar Project in Beltrami County, Minnesota

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11 MPUC DOCKET NO. E-017/GS-24-309

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16 Meeting held remotely via:

17 Webex and Telephone

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20 December 18, 2024

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25 COURT REPORTER: Christine Simons, RMR, RPR

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1 MR. TREVOR CULBERTSON: Hello. My name
2 is Trevor Culbertson. I'm an energy facilities
3 planner with the Minnesota Public Utilities
4 Commission. Thank you for attending today's
5 discussion and taking time out of your evening.
6 This is an important part of the permitting process,
7 and we appreciate and value all of your input.

8 This is the public information and
9 environmental assessment scoping meeting on Otter
10 Tail Power Company's solar -- excuse me, Solway
11 Solar project. Today is December 18th, and we are
12 meeting virtually via Webex.

13 The meeting agenda will include a brief
14 summary of the State's siting permitting process,
15 followed by a description of the project, and,
16 lastly, a summary of the environmental review
17 requirements by the Minnesota Department of
18 Commerce. After the presentation, there will be an
19 opportunity for any questions and comments, and
20 there's a court reporter who will transcribe those
21 comments for the docket record.

22 So the proposed project by Solway Solar
23 is a solar energy facility with an up to 66-megawatt
24 alternating current capacity in Lammers Township in
25 Beltrami County, Minnesota. The proposed project

1 would consist of roughly 100,000 solar panels
2 located on approximately 267 acres within a 487-acre
3 site. It would also require an additional
4 transformer and less than 500 feet of overhead
5 transmission line.

6 This is just an overview of the
7 government units involved in the permitting process.
8 The Public Utilities Commission is the unit that
9 reviews applications and issues site and route
10 permits in Minnesota. The Department of Commerce
11 manages the environmental review process for the
12 Commission, and, in this case, prepares an
13 environmental assessment.

14 And then later on in the process, there
15 will be an Administrative Law Judge from the Office
16 of Administrative Hearings who will facilitate a
17 public hearing, and provide a report to the
18 Commission setting forth findings, conclusions, and
19 recommendations.

20 I'll go over this briefly, but this is
21 just an overview of the PUC's role. There's five
22 Commissioners who are appointed by the Governor and
23 are confirmed by the Senate. We regulate
24 electricity, natural gas, and telephone services.
25 Our mission is to ensure safe, adequate, and

1 efficient utility services at fair and reasonable
2 rates. And we provide an independent, professional
3 oversight and regulation of utility service
4 providers that is a manner consistent with the
5 public interest.

6 So this is just a high-level overview of
7 the project requirements for a permit. Before it
8 can be constructed, the PUC must issue a site permit
9 because it is larger than 500 megawatts. The
10 associated transmission line is less than 1,500 feet
11 in length, so a route permit is not required. And,
12 also, solar projects of this size are exempt from
13 needing a certificate of need due to a recent
14 legislation that was passed in the state.

15 So the considerations needed in the
16 permit are as follows, according to Minnesota
17 regulations: The potential human and environmental
18 impacts of the project need to be considered.
19 There's a list there, including things such as
20 noise, aesthetics, public health; land use
21 conflicts; any cultural and historic resources; air
22 and water quality; plants and wildlife. And any
23 measures that will need to be considered, are there
24 any suitable ways of minimizing, mitigating, or
25 avoiding the identified impacts above? And Logan

1 with Commerce will go into that in more detail.

2 And, now, I will hand it off to Preston
3 with Otter Tail Power.

4 MR. PRESTON RIEWER: Thanks, Trevor.

5 Yeah. So Preston Riewer with Otter Tail
6 Power. I'll be the project manager for the Solway
7 Solar project.

8 You can go to the next slide.

9 So just a little background of Otter Tail
10 Power Company, we serve customers across Minnesota
11 and North Dakota and South Dakota. It's about
12 133,000 customers that we serve across those three
13 states in 422 different communities.

14 Just some facts there: The average
15 population size of our communities is about 400
16 people, so very rural-in-nature communities. And,
17 again, just that we have about 6,348 miles of
18 transmission line, 8,413 miles of distribution
19 lines, and several generation facilities spread
20 across those three states.

21 Just an overview of our energy generation
22 mix, you can see back in 2005, we had about
23 86 percent of our generation mix came from coal.
24 Now in 2023, that's dropped below 50 percent. Our
25 renewables now in 2023 are right around 35 percent,

1 and I know our target for 2030 is to have renewables
2 around the 50 to 60 percent mark. And then you can
3 see out in 2050 there, renewables make up about
4 80 percent of our generation mix.

5 Just a little background on the project
6 itself: So we currently own and operate an
7 approximately 48-megawatt combustion turbine north
8 of Solway, Minnesota, and the solar project itself
9 will be located adjacent to this combustion turbine.

10 One thing that's really beneficial about
11 this project is the interconnection queue within our
12 grid operator, MISO, can be problematic for projects
13 to come online, and this helps both in a cost
14 effective and timely manner by utilizing this
15 existing interconnection. It's also -- it's land
16 that Otter Tail already owns. So, ultimately,
17 Solway Solar is just an excellent opportunity to
18 provide a low-cost, carbon-free resource for our
19 Minnesota customers.

20 To the need aspect of it, Otter Tail
21 Power submitted an integrated resource plan to our
22 Minnesota Commission, and per the July 22nd, 2024,
23 Commission order, Otter Tail must pursue no less
24 than 200 megawatts and up to 300 megawatts of solar
25 resources, with a commercial operation date of

1 November 1, 2027, or as soon as practicable
2 thereafter. And, again, just to that need aspect,
3 Solway Solar provides a low-cost surplus
4 interconnection opportunity through MISO, and,
5 again, it adheres to this timeline.

6 So, again, a little more into the project
7 itself, Trevor mentioned it's a proposed up to
8 66-megawatt solar generation facility. It's
9 approximately 100,000 solar panels, and it's
10 estimated to generate enough electricity to power
11 about 9,000 homes annually.

12 As you can see there on the map, just
13 north of the town of Solway and adjacent to land --
14 the land that currently occupies the combustion
15 turbine, and then the land for the solar site is
16 adjacent to it.

17 So this -- the project itself, the
18 location, it offers an opportunity to add solar
19 generation to meet the carbon-free standard here in
20 Minnesota, while using an existing transmission
21 interconnection to help keep costs as low as
22 possible for our customers.

23 We expect it to have several benefits.
24 We list a few here, increased electric reliability
25 and resilience. There are no fuel costs with a

1 solar facility resulting in fuel clause savings for
2 those Minnesota customers. It provides access to
3 low-cost renewable energy, and it helps offset other
4 high-cost generation during peak energy use periods.

5 These are some of the economic benefits,
6 you know, some of the direct economic benefits for
7 both Beltrami County and Lammers Township. So in
8 the blue there, you can see the \$4.2 million
9 estimated to be generated in production tax over the
10 life of the facility. That \$4.2 million, again,
11 over the life of the facility. 80 percent of the
12 tax revenue will go to Beltrami County and
13 20 percent of tax revenue will go to Lammers
14 Township. At the same time, another benefit for the
15 local community during construction, approximately
16 70 jobs is expected to be created during peak
17 construction.

18 This slide here just looks at a
19 preliminary design as part of our site permit
20 application. The first piece there, it's a
21 single-axis tracking system in north-south
22 orientation. So, essentially, the panels will be
23 mounted on top of a steel tracking system that will
24 allow the panels to follow the sun from east to west
25 throughout the day. And this just helps these,

1 basically, capture as much efficiency from the sun
2 as possible.

3 Right now the estimate is 15 inverters.
4 These inverters are a key component of the -- taking
5 the solar energy and converting it into energy
6 that's useable by the grid. The panel layout
7 currently avoids impacts to any wetlands. And then,
8 again, the project interconnects with an existing
9 transmission line there at the combustion turbine.

10 Just a brief overview for a timeline
11 here, so right now we -- well, not right now, I
12 guess we're past this a little bit. We're kind of
13 in the process of the interconnection application
14 with our grid operator, MISO. We have now -- we are
15 also, of course, in the process of state permitting,
16 which we expect to conclude some time right around
17 the fourth quarter of 2025. With construction then
18 occurring in the -- essentially the construction
19 season of 2026. We then hope to have an operational
20 solar facility at the end of 2026.

21 That is it for my presentation. I can
22 take any questions, if there are any.

23 MR. TREVOR CULBERTSON: Yeah. I'll hand
24 it off to Logan, and then we'll do any questions
25 after that.

1 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Awesome. Yeah. Thank
2 you, Preston.

3 Thank you, Trevor.

4 So I want to say, first and foremost,
5 thank you for attending today. You know, the more
6 people that attend here and the more people that
7 show up, it makes my job easier, and I'll actually
8 go into more of why that is so in a bit.

9 But as you can see there, my name is
10 Logan Hicks. I work with the Department of
11 Commerce. I'm the environmental review manager.

12 Next slide, please.

13 So, I guess, the big question that I'm
14 going to answer today is what the Department of
15 Commerce is doing here. In my unit, we do the
16 Energy Environmental Review and Analysis, so I'm
17 going to cover what we do. I'm going to cover the
18 environmental review process that we undertake at
19 the Department of Commerce.

20 Then, I'm going to talk a little bit
21 about how to comment today, and then I'm going to
22 let you guys answer any questions, give me any
23 comments you have, and I'll talk about how we can do
24 that.

25 Next slide, please.

1 All right. So the Department of
2 Commerce, the Energy Environmental Review and
3 Analysis team -- my unit -- it is our job to prepare
4 what is called an environmental assessment for the
5 Public Utilities Commission.

6 So in this environmental assessment, it
7 is a -- it's a, you know, document that just goes
8 over all of the different potential human and
9 environmental impacts that could be caused by
10 this -- by this project being undertaken. So the
11 idea is to put these -- put these impacts out, and
12 to describe how things could be mitigated, avoided,
13 or minimized.

14 Now, the intent of this document is to be
15 a completely third-party, neutral review. It's not
16 to advocate or condone or, you know, anything like
17 that, in -- either for or against the project. It
18 is more so to just be as neutral as possible, and it
19 is to create an informed decision-making document
20 for the Public Utilities Commission to make the best
21 choice possible.

22 Next slide, please.

23 So the point of these meetings that we
24 have are for the public to have input on what we
25 review in the environmental assessment. So there's

1 a, sort of, table of contents, if you will, that the
2 environmental assessment would cover, and some of
3 those things are like human/environmental impacts;
4 strategies to help minimize or mitigate those
5 impacts; different alternatives that could be used
6 to, you know, help eliminate any impacts; to go over
7 certain permit-specific conditions, things that are
8 unique to this project; and, you know, the unique
9 characteristics for the area that the project is
10 under.

11 There's just a quick timeline of, you
12 know, where we're at. So as of right now, we're in
13 the public info and scoping meetings. After these
14 are concluded, I will -- we'll have a scoping
15 decision for what the EA will entail, and then the
16 EA will be, you know, issued.

17 And then there will be a public comment
18 period with an Administrative Law Judge from the
19 Office of Administrative Hearings where the public
20 can say, hey, you did good at talking about this,
21 but you didn't do so great about talking about this.
22 We'd like to put that in the record. And it just
23 kind of gives the public more of an opportunity to
24 make their voice heard and -- you know, for the
25 findings and all the things that were presented in

1 the environmental assessment.

2 Then, there will be a final round of
3 findings and responses to all these comments, and
4 then it will be time for the decision to be made by
5 the PUC sometime around August of 2025. Maybe a
6 little later, maybe a little earlier depending on
7 how things go.

8 Next slide.

9 So the big thing we're talking about
10 today is how to comment. So today you can have
11 verbal comments at today's meeting. It will be --
12 it will be presented, and you guys can -- it will be
13 on the record, and you can have it for you guys --
14 you can have it -- it will be on the record, and
15 your name will be attached to it. So make sure if
16 you would like to talk, you are aware of that.

17 So there's other ways you can also
18 comment. You can also fill out a comment online.
19 There's a link there. Oh, we lost it, but there was
20 a link there. If you follow that link, you can
21 actually go to a comment there.

22 This is an open public period -- open
23 comment period, and it is open until January 8th.
24 It's -- try to get it in the end of the day of
25 January 8th. If it comes in a little late, that's

1 fine, but, you know, I would prefer anything before
2 January 8th would be most desirable.

3 Or you could also mail, fax, or e-mail
4 anything you want to that number and that e-mail
5 address that you see there. You know, we try to
6 make it as open for people as possible. So, you
7 know, multiple ways that you can get your comments
8 in about this particular facility being built.

9 Next slide, please.

10 Some commenting etiquette: You can have
11 one speaker at a time, please. State and spell your
12 name for the court reporter so they can make sure
13 that's written in the record clearly. Limit your
14 comments to just a few minutes, and most of all,
15 really respect -- maintain respect for others. No
16 name calling, no belittling people, do not attack
17 any people indirect -- or directly.

18 All right. With that, is there anybody
19 who would like to comment, any questions?

20 I am actually not seeing anyone. We had
21 an attendee, and they are no longer in here.

22 MR. TREVOR CULBERTSON: The one call-in
23 person?

24 MR. PRESTON RIEWER: Oh, yeah. The one
25 call-in, Paul Vukonich was able to join from Otter

1 Tail Power.

2 MR. TREVOR CULBERTSON: Okay. That's
3 what I figured, just double checking.

4 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: And, Trevor, there
5 was briefly one attendee, I think, that was on at
6 least for the bulk of the presentation, and then
7 jumped off when we were in the middle of Logan's
8 presentation.

9 MR. LOGAN HICKS: Yeah, that's correct.
10 I saw them get on, and then they left about halfway
11 through my presentation. They were able to -- they
12 were in during Preston's presentation though, so...

13 MR. TREVOR CULBERTSON: Well, if there is
14 no one else on then right now, we are probably okay
15 to adjourn then.

16 Is that okay with everybody, or do we
17 have any thoughts?

18 MR. LOGAN HICKS: I'm okay with that.

19 MS. CHRISTY BRUSVEN: That makes sense to
20 me, too.

21 MR. PRESTON RIEWER: Yeah, sounds good.

22 (End of public comment.)
23
24
25

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1 SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING - 24-309

2 December 19, 2024 - 6:00 p.m.

3 BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

4 AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

5
6 In the Matter of the Application of Otter Tail Power
7 Company for a Site Permit for the up to 66 MW Solway
8 Solar Project in Beltrami County, Minnesota

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11 MPUC DOCKET NO. E-017/GS-24-309

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16 Meeting held at Solway Elementary School,
17 Solway, Minnesota

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21 December 19, 2024

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23
24 Court Reporter: Lorna D. Jacobson

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1 TREVOR CULBERTSON: Hey, everybody.

2 Thanks for coming out.

3 Can you hear me all right?

4 My name is Trevor Culbertson. I'm an
5 energy facilities planner with the Public Utilities
6 Commission. Thanks for attending today and taking
7 time out of your evening.

8 This is an important part of the
9 permitting process, and we appreciate and value all
10 of your input. And this is -- just for the record,
11 this is the public information and environmental
12 assessment scoping meeting on Otter Tail Power
13 Company's Solway Solar Project.

14 Today is December 19th, and we're having
15 our meeting in Solway, Minnesota.

16 So, this is just kind of the agenda
17 today. We'll kind of do an introduction of the
18 review process by me, and then we'll talk about the
19 proposed project and then we will have Logan Hicks,
20 who is with the Department of Commerce. And he
21 couldn't make it today, but I have him on the phone
22 right here. Hopefully, you'll be able to hear him.
23 I'll put it on the mic. And he'll talk about the
24 environmental review process, and then there will be
25 time for comments and questions from you guys.

1 Like I said, our people at the table
2 will talk about this more, but Solway Solar is a
3 new solar energy convergent facility with up to
4 66 megawatts alternating current capacity in
5 Lammers Township in Beltrami County, Minnesota. It
6 would consist of, roughly, 100,000 solar panels
7 located on approximately 267 acres within a 487-acre
8 site. It would also require an additional
9 transformer and less than 500 feet of overhead
10 transmission line.

11 So, the Public Utilities Commission is
12 the government unit that reviews applications for
13 energy projects and issues site and route permits
14 throughout the industry. The Department of Commerce
15 manages the environmental review process for the
16 Commission, and in this case, will prepare an
17 environmental assessment. And then later on in the
18 process, we will have an administrative law judge,
19 who will facilitate a public hearing. And it will
20 be similar to this, only the judge will be there.
21 And they will create a report from comments in the
22 record and comments from the hearing and provide
23 that report to the Commission that will help them
24 decide on their decision.

25 I will keep this brief. But in case you

1 don't know about the Public Utilities Commission,
2 there are five commissioners that are appointed by
3 the governor to regulate electricity, natural gas
4 and telephone services. Our mission is to ensure
5 that there is safe, adequate and efficient utility
6 services at fair and reasonable rates. We also
7 provide an independent, professional oversight and
8 regulation of utility service providers that is
9 consistent with the public interest.

10 So, the project requirements for a permit
11 in this case, is because it's larger than 50
12 megawatts, they need a site permit. Because the
13 associated transmission line is less than 1500 feet
14 in length, they do not need a permit for the
15 transmission line. So, a route permit is not
16 required. And also, solar projects of this size are
17 exempt from needing a certificate of need, due to
18 recent legislation that was passed in the senate,
19 and the applicant does not need to provide a
20 certificate of need in this case.

21 So, Logan will talk about this more. But
22 these are some of the Minnesota regulations that
23 need to be considered. So, Logan Hicks can talk
24 about this more. But here are just some of the
25 things to consider are the noise, public health and

1 safety, land use conflicts, aesthetics, cultural and
2 historic resources, air and water quality and plants
3 and wildlife, and to look at ways to minimize,
4 mitigate or avoid impacts on those sort of
5 considerations.

6 Now I will hand it off to Otter Tail
7 Power, Preston.

8 PRESTON RIEWER: I'm going to stand up
9 over here, so I don't have to turn my head so much.

10 I'm Preston Riewer, with Otter Tail
11 Power. I'm project manager for the Solway Solar
12 site.

13 So, just a little bit about Otter Tail
14 Power Company. We serve over 133,000 customers
15 across three states: Minnesota, North Dakota and
16 South Dakota. The average size of our 422
17 communities that we do serve, is about 400 people.
18 So, there, you have rural investor-owned utilities.
19 There are a few numbers there. I don't expect
20 everyone to remember the miles of transmission lines
21 or distribution lines. But on the map there, you
22 can see several generation facilities that we have
23 across our service territory.

24 This is a look back, as well as looking
25 forward at our energy generation mix.

1 Back in 2005, you can see, we were about
2 86% coal, and fairly minimal everywhere else. Since
3 then, we've moved more into a more of an
4 all-of-the-above energy approach. And we'll
5 continue to have that approach throughout. But
6 ultimately, 2050 is when we reach more of an 80%
7 renewable energy generation mix.

8 So, just a little bit of background. So,
9 we currently own and operate the combustion turbine
10 that's sitting on the site there. It's
11 approximately about 48 megawatts, just north of
12 Solway, Minnesota. One piece with this, of course,
13 because we own already the combustion turbine that
14 is north of Solway, the interconnection can
15 sometimes be problematic. So, with the
16 interconnection already sitting there, we can bring
17 online the solar facility in a cost-effective and
18 timely manner. And we also, of course, have the
19 land owned by Otter Tail Power. So, again, this
20 provides a really good opportunity for a low-cost,
21 carbon-free resource for our Minnesota customers.

22 And kind of further on why we're doing
23 the project. So, we filed an integrated resource
24 plan with our Minnesota Commission. And from that
25 resource plan, our Minnesota Commission, on

1 July 22nd this past year -- or this year, I guess,
2 this summer, the Commission ordered Otter Tail Power
3 to pursue no less than 200 megawatts, and up to
4 300 megawatts of solar. And they want us to bring
5 those online by November 1st, 2027, or as soon as
6 practicable, essentially. And this, again, provides
7 a low-cost surplus interconnection opportunity
8 through MISO, which is our original grid operator,
9 that adheres to this timeline.

10 The project, itself, as Trevor mentioned,
11 it's an up to 66 megawatts solar generation
12 facility. There will be about a hundred thousand
13 solar panels spread across that 267-acre footprint.
14 And it, roughly, generates enough electricity to
15 power about 9,000 homes in a year, which is just
16 kind of a reference point there.

17 And again, you can see on the map there,
18 the transmission line that runs along the southern
19 border right near the combustion turbine that
20 already sits there; and of course, the solar
21 facility will be on the land we own on the north
22 side.

23 A little bit further on this. We, again,
24 selected this location because it offers us a really
25 good opportunity to meet Minnesota's carbon-free

1 standard, while using that existing interconnection,
2 which could be a large cost for customers. So, this
3 helps keep costs as low as possible and provides
4 access to the low-cost, renewable energy, especially
5 right alongside that combustion turbine for that
6 increased reliability and resilience.

7 There is no fuel cost, of course, once
8 the plan is in place. And because the general
9 nature of solar facilities, it does help offset
10 high-cost generalization during peak energy use
11 times.

12 A little bit on the economic benefits.
13 During construction we expect about 70 jobs to be
14 created during the peak of that construction. There
15 will be an estimated 4.2 million dollars over the
16 life of the facility that's generated via the
17 production tax. This production tax goes directly
18 to the local communities; 80% of the tax revenue
19 will go to Beltrami County and 20% of that tax
20 revenue will go to Lammers Township.

21 Again, a little bit more in-depth look at
22 the preliminary design of the project. We'll
23 utilize the single-axis tracking system.
24 Essentially, what this means is it will track the
25 sun as it rises and sets from east to west. This

1 just maximizes the amount of power that we can
2 generate with these hundred thousand panels.

3 There will be, roughly, fifteen
4 inverters. These inverters essentially takes the DC
5 energy that's created from the solar panels and
6 converts it into usable energy for the grid.

7 And the panel layout, as you can see on
8 the map here, there are some wetlands in the western
9 and northwestern portion of the property that we
10 own. But we are avoiding those wetlands. And
11 again, as I mentioned, it utilizes that existing
12 transmission line.

13 The timeline here, the interconnection
14 application, so that's with MISO, we still need to
15 tell them, essentially, what we're doing. So, that
16 occurred this past summer. We don't expect much to
17 come from that, other than just kind of giving us
18 the go-ahead there from our grid operator. And of
19 course, we're in the State permitting process right
20 now, which started back in October. And we expect
21 to have complete by October of '25, if not, a few
22 months sooner. With that, of course, the
23 construction being in the, you know, what we call
24 the "construction season," kind of the April through
25 October of 2026. Again, then hoping for an

1 operational date at the end of 2026.

2 So, yeah. That's it for my presentation.
3 And then, hopefully, we can get Logan on the phone.

4 LOGAN HICKS: Hi, everybody.

5 My name is Logan Hicks. I want to
6 apologize for not being able to be there in person.
7 And thank you for spending time with me while we
8 work through some issues.

9 (Off the record discussion)

10 LOGAN HICKS: Sorry about the technical
11 issues, but I'm wanting to thank everybody, also,
12 for just coming out today and being informed, you
13 know, citizens of the public. And it's really good,
14 because it actually helps with my job, which is
15 something I'll explain a little bit more.

16 So, on the first slide here, my name is
17 Logan Hicks. I work with the Department of
18 Commerce. I'm the Energy Environmental Review and
19 Analysis Unit.

20 As we go to the next page you can see
21 what the Energy Environmental Review and Analysis
22 Unit does.

23 I will talk a little bit about what the
24 environmental review is and what it entails. Then
25 we'll go over how to comment, because at the end of

1 this, we will have a chance to ask any questions or
2 deliver any comments verbally.

3 So, the next slide here. So, I guess, as
4 I said before, at the Department of Commerce, we
5 stand alone from the Public Utilities Commission.
6 We work with them in the way that inter-agency
7 offices often do, in that we support each other when
8 we can.

9 This is a third-party agency doing
10 environmental review for the Public Utilities
11 Commission. So, we will prepare what's called an
12 "Environmental Assessment." It's a document that
13 covers several different factors, in terms of the
14 environmental things, such as the potential human or
15 environmental impacts. The document will disclose
16 different ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate those
17 impacts. And I would like to record this document
18 is not a decisionmaking document. This document is
19 designed to present to the Public Utilities
20 Commission to they have all of the best knowledge
21 available to make an informed decision and whether,
22 you know, they go forward with the permit and what,
23 you know, should the permit conditions entail.

24 So, the next slide here. The reason we
25 ask people to come today and always, you know, want

1 people to say involved is because actually, you guys
2 help me decide what the environmental assessment
3 will entail. Like I said, it needs to be an
4 informed decision based on documents. And there are
5 standards of things that we do review. However,
6 every site is unique; no two projects are the same.
7 And who knows the area better about the area where
8 it's being built than the folks that live there.
9 So, the folks, like you guys, you're on the ground,
10 you see this stuff every day. And we can only do so
11 much, you know, on our side. So, that's why we get
12 the public involved. And you guys can make comments
13 about, "Hey. There's a river here," or, "There's a
14 creek that flows through here that isn't on the
15 map," could you please make sure that it's marked,
16 and we'll definitely cover that. We will look at
17 it, and we will make sure that it gets put inside
18 the environmental assessment, and we will add a sort
19 of specific permit condition that may be required to
20 help cover that, or I should say, to suggest it.
21 The Public Utilities Commission will be the ones to
22 decide that in the end. But it's a way for you
23 folks to tell us exactly what you would like to see
24 in this environmental review document.

25 So, the next slide here is more

1 timelines. You've heard a little bit of the
2 timelines before. But as you can see, we're on the
3 Number 2 step, the public utility scoping meetings.

4 So, after the public comment period
5 closes, we will have, assuming there's a decision
6 issued, and we will create an EA. An EA will go out
7 into the public for your review. And then we will
8 have public hearings, as Trevor said, with an
9 administrative law judge. So, it will be a very
10 formal review. And you can say, "Hey. You guys did
11 great with that EA," or, "No. Go back and look at
12 this again."

13 And you can put your input into the
14 public record. This will help the judge create a
15 report and send it to the Public Utilities
16 Commission, with recommendations; and then they will
17 decide, ultimately, what goes into the permit or if
18 the permit should be issued at all.

19 So, the next slide here is just more ways
20 you can comment about the project being built.

21 There are a couple of ways to do that --
22 more than a couple of ways to do that. At the end
23 of the presentation today, as I said earlier, you'll
24 be able to give some verbal comments. You can also
25 complete and submit a comment sheet. Trevor should

1 have those on the front desk if you would like to
2 write those. Leave those with him and he'll get
3 them to me, or you can fold them up and put a stamp
4 on it and send it through the mail. They are
5 pre-addressed. I have my address there. You can
6 write your own letter. I have my address there.
7 There's an on-line link, as well. You can do it,
8 you know, through there. I will take anything. You
9 just can't call me and tell me your issues; they
10 have to be on the record, either written or verbally
11 today.

12 And you'll see at the bottom of the
13 slide, January 8th is the deadline for comments.
14 So, please make sure you get all your comments on
15 what you want to see in the environmental
16 assessments, to me, you know, before that deadline,
17 please.

18 So, the next slide. I'll talk a little
19 bit about commenting etiquette. When it's time for
20 people to actually come up and speak, ask questions
21 or give comments, we ask that you do it one speaker
22 at a time. We ask that you state and spell your
23 name for our court reporter, so it can be put in the
24 record. And then also, please limit your comments
25 to, you know, just a few minutes. We don't want you

1 to go so long that you're taking up time from other
2 people.

3 And speaking of other people, we ask that
4 you have respect for others, as well. No
5 name-calling. Don't attack anybody, personally.
6 This is supposed to be an open forum, but we don't
7 need anything hostile. Also, make sure you're
8 directing your questions or comments to the
9 environmental assessment. We're trying to maintain
10 the parameters of specifically this project; not
11 anything else that's been previously brought up in
12 the area or anything like that.

13 So, the next line is just some topics for
14 comment. You know, if you would like to get your
15 brain going, you know, what are some of the things
16 that we need to note to make an important decision.
17 You know, like, are there any sort of community
18 environmental impacts, and if there are ways that we
19 could help mitigate any of those environmental
20 impacts.

21 So, with that, I will give it back to
22 Trevor so that he can start the comments and
23 question portion and help facilitate that.

24 I will stay on the line if anybody has
25 any questions for me. But in the meantime, Trevor,

1 just take it away.

2 TREVOR CULBERTSON: Thanks, Logan.

3 So, do we have another mic?

4 (Discussion off the record.)

5 TREVOR CULBERTSON: We can just hand this
6 around. That's totally fine.

7 Now it's open for any comments or
8 questions that may be directed toward Logan or the
9 advocates. And if you do have any, just let me know
10 and I will walk over with the microphone.

11 You want to go ahead?

12 CARL BLEILER: Carl Bleiler. My last
13 name is spelled B-l-e-i-l-e-r.

14 I have two questions about the project.
15 You say you already own 400 acres up there now, and
16 you'll only use 267 acres for the solar panels.
17 What are you doing with the other couple hundred
18 acres? How is that going to be managed?

19 PRESTON RIEWER: Do you want me to take
20 the mic?

21 CARL BLEILER: The other thing I can
22 think of is, with a hundred thousand panels out
23 there, and not being real familiar with solar
24 energy, is there any amount of additional heat
25 generated around the site that we should be

1 concerned about?

2 PRESTON RIEWER: I will just work
3 backwards.

4 So, the answer to the second part of your
5 question is, is there additional heat?

6 No. Again, we have another facility near
7 Fergus Falls, a solar, a very similar site size as
8 this one. And there is no additional heat to the
9 site that you are going to feel. Now, maybe if you
10 touch a panel, there may be some heat there. But
11 again, this will be a solely fenced-off site. So,
12 there's no individuals in the site. But in terms of
13 area heat, the answer is "No."

14 And the rest of the property,
15 essentially, the remaining hundred acres that you
16 had mentioned, that will just allow the natural
17 growth of the property. We will continue, as we do
18 with all properties that we own, to make sure that
19 weeds are kept under control. But, essentially,
20 that remaining acreage will be allowed to go to a
21 natural state.

22 TREVOR CULBERTSON: Do you have any other
23 questions?

24 MIKE ROOTES: Mike Rootes, R-o-o-t-e-s.

25 My question is watershed. In case of

1 failures on these panels, I don't know what the
2 makeup of it is, but that water that comes off that
3 property will drain into the main source of the
4 river over there. I haven't seen anything on that;
5 that you have anything -- any place for that.

6 PAUL VUKONICH: Mike, when you say, "The
7 body of water that it runs off to --

8 MIKE ROOTES: I believe it's, like, the
9 township, they have to keep that cleaned out.

10 PAUL VUKONICH: So, the runoff enters the
11 township?

12 MIKE ROOTES: That's correct. And, I
13 mean, there's a lot of it in the spring.

14 PAUL VUKONICH: As part of the project
15 design, we run through some calculations to
16 calculate storm water retention basins throughout
17 the area. And there's actually a permitting process
18 with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to
19 obtain instructions for water runoff that will come
20 off the site. Throughout the area we will be able
21 to catch and take most of the storm water runoff
22 that will come off that site.

23 As far as the panels, if they crack, I
24 suppose it depends on how they fail. Silicone glass
25 that cracks, I don't know if I have an answer to

1 that. I don't know if we have any studies on that
2 yet. But that's something that I can make a note of
3 to find out.

4 PRESTON RIEWER: So, if it's a failure of
5 glass, they crack more like, you know, if there was
6 a hailstorm they would crack like a windshield.
7 It's not going to be like a shattering of glass;
8 that's how they are built. And then the leeching,
9 itself, in terms of if they were to break and
10 leech -- there has been a similar project to the
11 south that had experience with the failure, and
12 there have been no issues there. But that's been
13 the case with that.

14 MIKE ROOTES: So, you're saying there's
15 nothing going to come out of them if they fail?

16 PRESTON RIEWER: I wouldn't say there's
17 nothing that's going to come out of them. But
18 there's been no -- no issues with what does come out
19 of them.

20 TREVOR CULBERTSON: I normally mention
21 this in my presentation. But as part of the
22 process, it is not just the applicants, Commerce and
23 PCA involved, the Pollution Control Agency. It's
24 depending on the project, for example, there's
25 concerns about the watershed, the relevant agencies

1 would make comments and then I believe this will be
2 included in the permit.

3 And, Logan, I don't know if you heard
4 that, if you had anything else you wanted to say on
5 that.

6 LOGAN HICKS: No. Other than that is
7 definitely something that we can -- that's part of
8 our environmental review, is looking at any of the
9 potential impacts on the site, itself, and any of
10 the properties. And I would say, generally, there
11 is with the storm water, we have preventive plans,
12 and it depends on the factors. But it's a pretty
13 robust permit that would have to be cleared. So,
14 what we may consider in the environmental
15 assessment is we have to have, you know, the need
16 for, you know, having the permits done and it's
17 considered. Now if there's any agency like the DNR
18 concerned with water bodies or watershed areas, then
19 absolutely we will consider that with the
20 environmental assessment, as well.

21 TREVOR CULBERTSON: Thanks, Logan.

22 And if there's concern like this, we
23 don't need the public necessarily to say something
24 for the DNR to look into it, but it would be
25 helpful. But the other things we will look into it,

1 as well.

2 TREVOR CULBERTSON: Anyone else?

3 TARA ROOTES: Tara Rootes, R-o-o-t-e-s.

4 In the documentation that you sent out to
5 us, you said that you would clean up any phases.

6 How many phases are there planning to be
7 after the big one?

8 PRESTON RIEWER: So, I think you're
9 referring to our good neighbor agreements, which we
10 can talk offline more about. But what I can talk
11 about is the phases.

12 We plan to just build this one phase of
13 solar in this area. There is no current plan -- and
14 that, again, is in our site permit. There's no
15 current plans to build additional phases of the
16 solar.

17 TREVOR CULBERTSON: Any other questions
18 or comments?

19 We can also take a few-minute break if
20 you want, and if you think of anything you can come
21 back in again.

22 If anyone thinks, well, maybe I wanted to
23 say something, let me know and we can come back.
24 But I guess we will adjourn, if no one has anything
25 else.

1 LOGAN HICKS: They can send comments by
2 email. They don't have to be today. If they have
3 any questions they can reach out to any of us and we
4 can get them answers, as well.

5 TREVOR CULBERTSON: And again, that
6 comment period is January 8th. And so, if you do
7 think of something, you know how you get it to us.

8 If no one has anyone else, we'll adjourn.

9 Thank you for coming out today:

10 LOGAN HICKS: Thank you, everyone.

11 *****

12 (Meeting concluded 6:50 p.m.)
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