



**In the Matter of the Joint Application of Northern
Crescent Solar LLC for a Solar Energy Generating
System Site Permit and Battery Energy Storage
System Site Permit for the up to 150 MW
Northern Crescent Solar and Storage Project in
Faribault County, Minnesota**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
SCOPING DECISION**

**DOCKET NOS. IP-7135/GS-22-57
and ESS-24-238**

The above matter has come before the Commissioner of the Department of Commerce (Department) for a decision on the scope of the environmental assessment (EA) to be prepared Northern Crescent Solar LLC's proposed 150 megawatt (MW) solar energy and storage project in Verona and Prescott Townships, Faribault County, Minnesota.

Project Description

On August 14, 2024, Primergy Solar Acquisitions, LLC, dba Northern Crescent, LLC (Primergy or applicant) submitted a joint site permit application to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) to construct the Northern Crescent Solar Project – an up to 150 MW alternating current photovoltaic solar energy generating facility and associated 50 MW alternating current battery energy storage system.¹

The project will occupy approximately 929 acres in a project area of 1,179 acres in Verona and Prescott Townships, southeast of the city of Winnebago, Minnesota. The project will use photovoltaic solar panels mounted on single axis tracking systems. Underground collection cables will gather and send the electric power generated by the solar panels to a project substation. The substation will interconnect with the electrical grid via a new switchyard and an overhead generation tie transmission line. The project will include associated facilities, such as, security fencing, access roads, a supervisory control and data acquisition system, stormwater basins, and an operation and maintenance facility.²

The project substation and Xcel switchyard will be constructed in close proximity to each other, and will interconnect to the existing Huntley – Blue Earth 161 kV high voltage transmission line. The land or land rights needed for the Xcel switchyard and interconnection to the grid will be acquired or secured by Northern Crescent Solar and be conveyed to Xcel Energy. Xcel Energy will be responsible for the design, engineering, permitting, construction, and operation of the switchyard.³

Primergy indicated a generator interconnection agreement (GIA) from Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) will be needed to connect to the electrical transmission system. The applicant submitted an interconnection request through the MISO definitive planning phase study process in 2020, and a GIA is expected to be in place by the second half of 2024.⁴

¹ Northern Crescent Solar, LLC. August 18, 2024. Joint Site Permit Application, eDocket Nos. [20248-209500-01](#) (through -20), [20248-209501-01](#) (through -20), [20248-209502-01](#) (through -16), 20248-209503-01 (through -08) (hereinafter "Application").

² Joint Site Permit Application, Section 2.3.1

³ Joint Site Permit Application, Section 2.3.2

⁴ Id.

Project Purpose

Primergy indicates that the project will assist the State of Minnesota in meeting its renewable energy objectives, diversify electricity sources, meet anticipated growth in electricity demand, and meet consumers' growing demand for renewable energy. The project is expected to positively impact the electric grid by providing 50 MW of energy storage capacity, thus allowing output timing to the grid to shift from peak solar generation to peak electric demand. Primergy is working to secure a power purchase agreement, build transfer agreement, development transfer agreement, or other enforceable offtake agreements to sell the generated electricity. The power generated at the facility will be offer for sale to wholesale customers (e.g., Minnesota utilities and cooperatives) and commercial and industrial customers.⁵

Regulatory Background

In Minnesota, no person may construct a large electric power generating plant without a site permit from the Commission.⁶ A large electric power generating plant is defined as a facility capable of operating at a capacity of 50 MW or more.⁷ The Northern Crescent project will be capable of producing up to 150 MW and therefore requires a site permit from the Commission. Because the project is powered by solar energy, the site permit application qualifies for Commission review under the alternative permitting process described in Minnesota Statute 216E.04, Subd. 2.

As Primergy is an independent power producer, a certificate of need (CN) is not required for the project. The project is exempt under Minnesota Statute 216B.243, subd. 8(a)(8), which provides that a CN is not required for a "solar energy generating system, as defined in section 216E.01, subdivision 9a, for which a site permit application is submitted by an independent power producer under chapter 216E."⁸

Department of Commerce, Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) staff is responsible for conducting environmental review for site permit applications submitted to the Commission.⁹ EERA staff will prepare an environmental assessment (EA) for the project. An EA contains an overview of the resources affected by the project. It also discusses potential human and environmental impacts and possible mitigation measures.¹⁰ Under the alternative permitting process, an EA is the only required state environmental review document.

Scoping Process

Scoping is the first step in the environmental review process. The scoping process has two primary purposes: (1) to gather public input as to the impacts and mitigation measures to study in the EA and (2) to focus the EA on those impacts and mitigation measures that will aid in the Commission's decision on the site permit application.

Staff use the information gathered during scoping to inform the content of the EA. EERA staff gathered input on the scope of the EA through public meetings and an associated comment period. This scoping decision identifies the impacts and mitigation measures that will be analyzed in the EA.

⁵ Joint Site Permit Application, Section 1.1

⁶ Minnesota Statute 216E.03.

⁷ Minnesota Statute 216E.01.

⁸ Minnesota Statute 216B.243, Subd. 8(a)(8)

⁹ Minnesota Rule 7850.3700.

¹⁰ Minnesota Statute 216E.04, subd. 5; Minn. Rule 7850.3700, subp. 4.

Public Information and Scoping Meetings

On October 8, 2024, Commission and EERA staff jointly held a public meeting in Blue Earth, Minnesota. Approximately 11 people attended this meeting; one attendee provided public comment expressing approval of the project and the benefits it has for local workers.¹¹ The following evening, October 9, 2024, Commission and EERA staff held a remote-access public meeting. One individual from the public attended this meeting, and there were no comments.

Written Public Comments

A comment period ending on October 25, 2024, provided the public with an opportunity to provide input on the scope of the EA. Two written comments were received, both from state agencies.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) commented on potential environmental impacts near Highway US 169 and noted an expectation for the applicant to coordinate with MnDOT staff.¹²

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources made comments on certain issues related to equipment used for the project as well as environmental mitigations for construction and operation procedures.¹³

HAVING REVIEWED THE MATTER, consulted with EERA staff, and in accordance with Minnesota Rule 7850.3700, I hereby make the following scoping decision:

MATTERS TO BE ADDRESSED

The EA will describe the project and the human and environmental resources of the project area. It will provide information on the potential impacts of the project as they relate to the topics outlined in this scoping decision and possible mitigation measures. It will identify impacts that cannot be avoided and irretrievable commitments of resources, as well as permits from other government entities that may be required for the project. The EA will discuss the relative merits of the proposed project site with respect to the siting factors in Minnesota Rule 7850.4100.

The issues outlined below will be analyzed in the EA for the project. This outline is not intended to serve as a table of contents for the document itself.

I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

- A. Project Description
- B. Project Purpose
- C. Project Costs

¹¹ Northern Crescent Solar Project, Oral Comments on the Scope of Environmental Assessment, eDockets Number [202411-211652-02](#)

¹² Minnesota Department of Transportation, Comments on the Scope of Environmental Assessment, eDockets number [202410-211284-01](#)

¹³ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Comments on the Scope of Environmental Assessment, eDockets number [202410-211343-01](#)

II. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

- A. Site Permit
- B. Environmental Review
- C. Grid Interconnection
- D. Other Permits and Approvals

III. ENGINEERING, DESIGN, AND CONSTRUCTION

- A. Solar Arrays
- B. Electrical Collection Systems
- C. Battery Energy Storage System
- D. Substation
- E. Associated Facilities

IV. OPERATION AND DECOMMISSIONING

- A. Maintenance
- B. Vegetation Management
- C. Repowering and Decommissioning

V. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIVE MEASURES

The EA will include a discussion of the human and environmental resources potentially impacted by the project. Potential impacts of the project will be described and characterized. Based on the impacts identified, the EA will describe mitigation measures that could reasonably be implemented to reduce or eliminate the identified impacts. The EA will describe any unavoidable impacts resulting from implementation of the project.

Data and analyses will be commensurate with the level of impact for a given resource and the relevance of the information to consider mitigation measures. EERA staff will consider the relationship between the cost of data and analyses and the relevance and importance of the information in determining the level of detail of information to be prepared for the EA. Less important material may be summarized, consolidated, or simply referenced.

If relevant information cannot be obtained within timelines prescribed by statute and rule, the costs of obtaining such information is excessive, or the means to obtain it is unknown, EERA staff will include in the EA a statement that such information is incomplete or unavailable and the relevance of the information in evaluating potential impacts or alternatives.

- A. Environmental Setting
- B. Human Settlements
 - 1. Noise
 - 2. Aesthetics
 - 3. Displacement
 - 4. Property Values
 - 5. Zoning and Land Use Compatibility
 - 6. Cultural Values
 - 7. Transportation and Public Services
- C. Socioeconomics
 - 1. Environmental Justice

2. Local Economies
- D. Public Health and Safety
 1. Electric and Magnetic Fields
 2. Emergency Services
- E. Land Based Economies
 1. Agriculture
 2. Forestry
 3. Mining
 4. Recreation and Tourism
- F. Archaeological and Historic Resources
- G. Natural Environment
 1. Water Resources
 2. Soils
 3. Geology
 4. Flora
 5. Fauna
 6. Air Quality
 7. Climate Change / Climate Resiliency
- H. Threatened / Endangered / Rare and Unique Natural Resources
- I. Electric System Reliability
- J. Adverse Impacts that Cannot be Avoided
- K. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

ISSUES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE EA

The EA will not address following topics:

- Any site other than the project site proposed by the applicant.
- The manner in which landowners are compensated for the project.

SCHEDULE

The EA is anticipated to be completed and available in February 2025. Public hearings will be held in the project area after issuance of the EA. Comments on the EA may be submitted into the hearing record.

Signed this 13th day of November, 2024

STATE OF MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Wyckoff", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Peter Wyckoff, Deputy Commissioner

Northern Crescent Solar and Storage Project Overview Map

