

Appendix A

Scoping Decision



**In the Matter of the Joint Application of
Minnesota Power for a Site and Route Permit for
the 85 Megawatt Boswell Solar Project and
Associated 2.45-mile 230 Kilovolt Transmission
Line in Itasca County, Minnesota**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
SCOPING DECISION**

**DOCKET NOS. E015/GS-24-425 and
E015/TL-24-426**

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 for Minnesota Power's proposed 85 megawatt (MW) solar energy project and associated 2.45 mile 230 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to be located in parts of the city of Cohasset, the Leech Lake Band of the Ojibwe Reservation, and Deer Lake Township in Itasca County, Minnesota.

Project Description

On December 30, 2024, Minnesota Power submitted a site permit application to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) to construct and operate the Boswell Solar Project (project) – an 85 MW alternating current photovoltaic solar energy generating facility and associated 2.45 mile 230 kV gen-tie transmission line.¹

The project area is approximately 1,345 acres located in parts of the city of Cohasset, the Leech Lake Band of the Ojibwe Reservation, and Deer Lake Township in Itasca County, Minnesota. The solar facility footprint and associated transmission line right-of-way would encompass 499 acres of the project area. The project will use photovoltaic solar panels mounted on a single-axis tracker racking system in linear arrays oriented north-south. The electric power generated by the solar panels will be transmitted to inverters and carried through underground collector system cables to the project substation. The project substation will transform the voltage to 230 kV, and the electrical energy will be transmitted to the existing Boswell Energy Center Substation via the proposed gen-tie line.

Minnesota Power will submit a surplus interconnection service (SIS) request with the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) for 85 MWac, seeking to share interconnection service with Boswell Generating Plant Unit 3. Minnesota Power will enter the request for SIS in the second quarter of 2025. The SIS process may take up to 270 calendar days to complete, at which time Minnesota Power expects to sign a generator interconnection agreement (GIA). Minnesota Power will notify the Commission when the GIA has been executed.²

Project Purpose

Minnesota Power indicates that the project will support the State of Minnesota in meeting its carbon-free standards, renewable energy standards, and solar energy standards. In addition, the project will continue Minnesota Power's efforts to meet its sustainability goals while remaining in compliance with Minnesota clean energy policy requirements. While delivering increasingly clean energy to customers,

¹ Minnesota Power, Joint Site and Route Permit Application to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, December 30, 2024, [eDockets](#) Nos. [202412-213417-01](#) (through -18).

² Site and Route Permit Application, Section 1.1.

Minnesota Power also aims to deliver safe, reliable, and affordable energy to customers across a smarter grid that is increasingly resilient.³

Regulatory Background

Large Electric Power Generating Plant Site Permit

In Minnesota, no person may construct a large electric power generating plant without a site permit from the Commission.⁴ A large electric power generating plant is defined as a facility capable of operating at a capacity of 50 MW or more.⁵ The Boswell Solar project will be capable of producing up to 85 MW and therefore requires a site permit from the Commission.

High Voltage Transmission Line Route Permit

In Minnesota, no person may construct a high voltage transmission line without a route permit from the Commission.⁶ A high voltage transmission line is defined as a conductor of electric energy designed for and capable of operation at a voltage of 100 kV or more and greater than 1,500 feet in length.⁷ The proposed project includes a 230 kV transmission line that will be approximately 2.45 miles in length and, therefore, requires a route permit from the Commission.

Certificate of Need

Because the project includes a solar energy generation facility that will meet the obligations of Minnesota Statute 216B.1691, a certificate of need (CN) is not required.⁸ Similarly, for the project generic line, a CN is not required because the 230 kV line is not a large energy facility and will directly interconnect the solar energy generating systems to the existing Boswell Energy Center Substation.⁹

Environmental Review

Department of Commerce, Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) staff is responsible for conducting the environmental review for site and route permit applications submitted to the Commission.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ An EA is the only required state environmental review document for this project.

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.

³ Minnesota Statute 216B.1691.; Site and Route Permit Application, Section 1.1.

⁴ Minnesota Statute 216E.03.

⁵ Minnesota Statute 216E.01.

⁶ Minnesota Statute 216E.03.

⁷ Minnesota Statute 216E.01.

⁸ Minnesota Statute 216B.243, Subd. 9.

⁹ Minnesota Statute 216B.243, subd. 8(a)(10).

¹⁰ Minnesota Rule 7850.3700.

¹¹ Minnesota Statute 216E.04, subd. 5; Minn. Rule 7850.3700, subp. 4.

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.

Public Information and Scoping Meetings

On April 3, 2025, Commission and EERA staff jointly held a remote-access public meeting. Approximately six individuals from the public attended this meeting, and there were no comments.¹² On April 21, 2025, Commission and EERA staff held an in-person public meeting in Cohasset, Minnesota. Approximately 25 people attended this meeting, with several attendees providing support for the project and Minnesota Power's dedication to using local union labor. Other attendees included local residents and homeowners who had questions and concerns related to tree removal, wildlife habitat, aesthetic impacts, potential damage to solar panels from weather, project fencing, and property value impacts.¹³

Written Public Comments

A comment period ending on May 5, 2025 provided the public with an opportunity to provide input on the scope of the EA. Written comments were received from two local members of the general public, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribe, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation.¹⁴

General Public

Two members of the general public, Wes Trout and Jeff Best, provided written comments related to several project components, including impacts to wildlife and habitat (including critical habitat and protected species), impacts to recreational activities such as hunting, land use change of forested areas and ecologically sensitive zones, and the resulting community impacts.

Comments also included questions about project fencing and recommendations for reducing impacts to adjacent properties through project design, such as by establishing wildlife corridors and visual screening plans.¹⁵ Mr. Trout questioned who would be responsible for repairing the solar facility fence. Mr. Best asked that Minnesota Power establish a buffer zone and/or vegetative screening to minimize impacts to his residence.

Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Bruno Zager provided comments on behalf of the Fond du Lac Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa.¹⁶ Mr. Zager noted that the project design overall looks good, but expressed concern over the proximity of the project site to the Mississippi River, noting the amount of water flow that comes off of solar panels.

¹² Boswell Solar Project, Oral Comments on the Scope of Environmental Assessment, April 2025, eDockets No. [20255-218719-01](#).

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Boswell Solar Project, Written Comments on the Scope of Environmental Assessment, April 2025, eDockets No. [20255-218719-02](#).

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Comment from the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, eDockets no. [20254-217114-01](#).

Minnesota Agencies

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provided written comments related to several project components and also provided a copy of the National Heritage Review letter.¹⁷ Comments included:

- Recommending the EA discuss project fencing plans, dust control products, lighting, erosion control, and mitigating impacts on wildlife consistent with DNR guidance.¹⁸
- Noting that a DNR Water Appropriation Permit is required for dewatering activities during construction if the water pumped exceeds 10,000 gallons in one day, and/or one million gallons in one year.
- Requesting the EA identify land and water crossings that will require a utility license from the DNR, as well as discuss the presence of Native Plant Communities and measures to avoid or minimize impacts to these resources.
- Encouraging coordination with the Office of School Trust Lands to identify potential impacts to state mineral ownership and avoidance measures.
- Requesting the EA discuss the construction and vegetation reestablishment phases in order to minimize stormwater runoff, stabilize soil, and support habitat for both the solar facility and the HVTL, and recommending consistency of the site permit application's Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) with the DNR's *Prairie Establishment and Maintenance Technical Guidance for Solar Projects*.¹⁹

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) provided written comments related to several project components.²⁰ Comments included:

- Noting the project's proximity to trunk highway (TH) 6 and the potential need for consultation with MnDOT.
- Requesting a review by MnDOT's District 3 Hydraulics Engineer to ensure the proposed project's water basins near the TH ROW line will not change the peak runoff rates to the TH ROW.
- Urging project proposers to plan and utilize access points on local roads whenever possible.
- Proposing two location changes to the current access road layout to 1) address proximity to other, existing accesses, and 2) address approach/driver sight safety concerns around proximity to the TH 6 curve in the southern portion of the project area.

¹⁷ Comments from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, eDockets Nos. [20254-218237-01](#) and [20254-218237-02](#).

¹⁸ Minnesota DNR, Commercial Solar Siting Guidance, February 2023. Retrieved from:

https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/ewr/commercial_solar_siting_guidance.pdf.

¹⁹ Minnesota DNR, Prairie Establishment and Maintenance Technical Guidance for Solar Projects, February, 2025. Retrieved from: https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/ewr/prairie_solar_tech_guidance.pdf.

²⁰ Comments from the Minnesota Department of Transportation, eDockets No. [20255-218589-01](#).

- Requesting that the Project Area or Project Boundary mapping does not overlap TH ROW limits in any way. Specifically, regarding TH ROW areas where the Applicant does not have land rights, clear and correct land/lease ownership boundaries should be displayed.

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 and route 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

II. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

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

III. ENGINEERING, DESIGN, AND CONSTRUCTION

- A. Solar Arrays
- B. Electrical Collection Systems
- C. Gen-Tie Line
- 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 (tree removal, visual screening)
 - 3. Displacement
 - 4. Property Values
 - 5. Zoning and Land Use Compatibility (setbacks, land use change)
 - 6. Cultural Values
 - 7. Transportation and Public Services (access roads)
- C. Socioeconomics
 - 1. Environmental Justice
 - 2. Local Economies (employment, wages)
- D. Public Health and Safety
 - 1. Electric and Magnetic Fields
 - 2. Emergency Services
- E. Land-Based Economies
 - 1. Agriculture (land impacts)
 - 2. Forestry (tree removal)
 - 3. Mining
 - 4. Recreation and Tourism (hunting)
- F. Archaeological and Historic Resources
- G. Natural Environment
 - 1. Water Resources (stormwater, public waters)
 - 2. Soils (erosion control)
 - 3. Geology
 - 4. Flora (vegetation removal and management, weed control, native plant communities)
 - 5. Fauna (wildlife corridors, erosion control, fencing, and lighting)
 - 6. Air Quality (fugitive dust)
 - 7. Climate Change / Climate Resiliency

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- H. Threatened / Endangered / Rare and Unique Natural Resources (protected species, DNR-managed lands)
- I. Cumulative Impacts Analysis
- 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 or route other than those proposed by the applicant in its joint application.
- The manner in which landowners are compensated for the project.

SCHEDULE

The EA is anticipated to be completed and available in August of 2025. Upon completion, it will be noticed and made available for review. Public hearings will be noticed and held in the project area after issuance of the EA. Comments on the EA may be submitted into the hearing record.

Signed this 30th day of May, 2025

STATE OF MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Pete Wyckoff, Deputy Commissioner

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Boswell Solar Project Overview Map

