



In the Matter of the Site Permit Application
for the 100 MW Aurora Distributed Solar
Energy Project at Multiple Facilities in
Minnesota

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
SCOPING DECISION
PUC DOCKET NO. E-6928/GS-14-515**

The above matter has come before the deputy commissioner of the Department of Commerce (Department) for a decision on the scope of the environmental assessment (EA) to be prepared for the Aurora Distributed Solar Energy Project (Project) proposed by Aurora Distributed Solar, LLC (Aurora) at up to 24 locations in 16 counties.

Project Description

Aurora proposes to construct 100 MW of distributed photovoltaic (PV) solar generation at up to 24 facilities in 16 counties in order to provide distributed solar energy to meet Xcel Energy's needs for additional capacity in the 2017 - 2019 timeframe. Nameplate capacity at each facility ranges from 1.5 to 10 megawatts (MW). Preliminary estimates of developed area at each facility range from approximately 13 to 108 acres. The Project is located in Benton, Blue Earth, Carver, Chippewa, Chisago, Dodge, Goodhue, Kandiyohi, Le Sueur, McLeod, Pipestone, Rice, Stearns, Waseca, Washington and Wright counties.

The Project as proposed would install PV modules mounted on a linear axis tracking system and a centralized inverter or inverters at each facility. Other components required to construct and operate the facilities include electrical cables, conduit, electrical cabinets, switchgears, step-up transformers, SCADA systems and metering equipment.

Each facility would connect to a separate Xcel Energy substation at the distribution level. During the development of the Project, Aurora identified Xcel Energy substations with available capacity. The Project has been developed to interconnect at the distribution level to increase reliability, minimize generation losses associated with longer transmission interconnections, and minimize lead-times and interconnection costs compared to transmission interconnections.

Aurora has identified 24 facility locations, shown in Table 1, where the necessary PV equipment and associated facilities would potentially be installed.

TABLE 1: PROPOSED FACILITY LOCATIONS

Facility Name	County	Approximate Acreage		Preliminary MW (Alternating Current)*
		Facility Land Control	Preliminary Development Area	
Albany	Stearns	231	107	10.0
Annandale	Wright	71	71	6.0
Atwater	Kandiyohi	40	36	4.0
Brooten	Stearns	13	13	1.5
Chisago County	Chisago	62	61	7.5
Dodge Center	Dodge	69	60	6.5
Eastwood	Blue Earth	50	50	5.5
Fiesta City	Chippewa	26	26	2.5
Hastings	Washington	41	41	5.0
Lake Emily	Le Sueur	47	42	5.0
Lake Pulaski	Wright	76	63	8.5
Lawrence Creek	Chisago	74	39	4.0
Lester Prairie	McLeod	30	26	3.5
Mayhew Lake	Benton	36	22	4.0
Montrose	Wright	38	35	4.0
Paynesville	Stearns	224	108	10.0
Pine Island	Goodhue	47	42	4.0
Pipestone	Pipestone	16	15	2.0
Scandia	Chisago	24	23	2.5
Waseca	Waseca	89	85	10.0
West Faribault	Rice	86	59	5.5
West Waconia**	Carver	76	78	8.5
Wyoming	Chisago	67	62	7.0
Zumbrota	Goodhue	36	32	3.5
Total Under Consideration		1606	1194	130.5

* Final MW- nameplate capacity of each solar energy generating system may vary based on technology selected and final design

** Preliminary Development Area boundary is larger than the Facility Land Control Boundary in this particular instance to accommodate possible interconnections in the public right-of-way on the north side of Highway 5/25.

As shown in the table above, the total nameplate capacity (in MW-Alternating Current) of all the proposed facilities is 130.5 MW. Aurora states that it does not anticipate constructing all 24 proposed facilities, but will determine the number and combination of facilities constructed during final design. Final design will be informed by permit conditions and site-specific conditions determined through engineering studies, environmental survey results, and interconnections details.

Regulatory Background

A site permit application for the Project was filed by Aurora on July 9, 2014, and accepted as complete by the Commission on September 24, 2014. The site permit application will be reviewed under the alternative permitting process, pursuant to the Power Plant Siting Act (Minnesota Statutes 216E) and Minnesota Rules 7850.2800 to 7850.3900.

Scoping Process

Scoping is the first step in the alternative permitting process after application acceptance. The scoping process has two primary purposes: (1) to ensure that the public has a chance to participate

in determining what sites and issues are studied in the EA, and (2) to help focus the EA on impacts and issues important to a reasoned site permit decision. This scope identifies potential human and environmental issues that will be addressed in the EA. The scope also presents an anticipated schedule of the environmental review process.

Public Scoping Meetings

On August 22, 2014, Commission staff sent notice of the place, date and times of the Public Information and Scoping meetings to those persons on the General List maintained by the Commission, the agency technical representatives list and the project contact list. Notice of the public meetings was also published in the local newspapers.

Commission staff and Department Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) staff jointly held six public information and scoping meetings at locations proximate to the 24 potential facility locations identified by Aurora. The purpose of the meetings was to provide information to the public about the proposed project, to answer questions, and to allow the public an opportunity to suggest alternatives and impacts (i.e., scope) that should be considered during preparation of the environmental review document. A court reporter was present at all of the meetings to document oral statements.

Table 2 provides a summary of meeting locations, approximate attendance and number of speakers.

Table 2: Public Meeting Summary

City	Meeting Location	Date and Time	Approximate Attendance	Speakers
Montrose	Montrose Community Center	Tuesday, September 9, 2014 11:00am - 2:00pm	12	9
Lindstrom	Chisago Lakes High School Performance Arts Center	Tuesday, September 9, 2014 6:00pm - 9:00pm	10	4
Marshall	YMCA	Wednesday, September 10, 2014 11:00am - 2:00pm	4	1
St. Paul	Public Utilities Commission	Tuesday September 16, 2014 11:00am - 2:00pm	2	0
Paynesville	Paynesville High School - Auditorium	Tuesday, September 16, 2014 6:00pm - 9:00pm	6	2
Faribault	Washington Recreation Center	Wednesday, September 17, 2014 11:00am - 2:00pm	7	1

In addition to the mailed and published notices of the public information and scoping meetings, EERA staff surveyed 67 local governmental units (cities, townships, counties) and the 7 regional development commissions where facility locations were proposed.

Public Comments

Forty-three written comments were received by the end of the scoping comment period on September 30, 2014. EERA staff received responses from 30 governmental units.

Scoping comments addressed a variety of topics including: compatibility with local zoning and planning; input of local governments into siting; appearance and materials used to fence the facilities; impacts of the proposed facilities on property values of adjacent properties; impacts to wildlife, specifically to birds; overall appearance of the solar installations and the potential for glare; noise during construction and operation of the facilities; impacts to agriculture; impacts to surface waters and stormwater runoff; and impacts to wetlands.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources identified issues related to vegetation management, rare and unique natural resources and wildlife to be included in the EA.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) clarified that MnDOT does not consider a solar generating project to be a public utility for transportation purposes and consequently would not allow Aurora to place connecting lines along trunk highways, although electric lines are permitted to cross trunk highways. MnDOT also identified that several proposed locations abut state trunk highways and would raise concerns about the placement of access roads, storm water retention pond drainage and noxious weed control.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture requested that the EA identify the potential duration of the land-use conversion from agricultural land at the proposed locations, information on agricultural suitability and productivity of soils, methods or locations that would minimize agricultural impacts, trends for loss of agricultural lands, and impacts of agricultural land conversion to local economies.

Scoping comments are available for viewing on the Department's energy facilities permitting website <http://mn.gov/commerce/energyfacilities/Docket.html?id=33924> and on eDockets: <https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/search.jsp> (enter "14" for year and "515" for number).

Commission Review

On October 14, 2014, EERA staff provided the Commission with a summary of the EA scoping process. The summary indicated that EERA staff would be recommending to the deputy commissioner of the Department that the scoping decision for the Project include only those facility locations proposed by Aurora in its site permit application for evaluation in the EA. On November 24, 2014, the Commission voted to take no action with respect to the site alternatives to be considered in the EA.

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

MATTERS TO BE ADDRESSED

The issues outlined below will be identified and described in the environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed Aurora Distributed Solar Project (Project). The EA will describe the Project and the human and environmental resources at each facility location. The EA will also provide information on the potential impacts of the proposed Project as they relate to the topics outlined in this scoping decision, including possible mitigation for identified impacts, identification of irretrievable commitment of resources, and permits from other government entities that may be required. Potential impacts will be discussed for the proposed 100 MW Project as a whole and for each proposed facility location. Analysis of a potential development area within two miles of each interconnection substation will be included in the EA.

The EA on the Project will address and provide information on the following matters:

- I. Project Description
- II. Project Purpose
- III. Regulatory Framework
 - a. Certificate of Need
 - b. Site Permit
 - c. Scoping Process
 - d. Public Hearing
 - e. Other Permits
 - f. Issues outside the EA
- IV. Proposed Project
 - a. Proposed Facility Locations
 - b. Alternative Sites Considered and Rejected
 - c. Site Requirements
 - d. Project Design
 - e. Project Construction
 - f. Project Operation and Maintenance
- V. Potential Impacts of Proposed Project
 - a. Human Settlement
 - i. Public Health and Safety
 - ii. Displacement
 - iii. Noise
 - iv. Aesthetics
 - v. Socioeconomics (including property values)
 - vi. Cultural Values
 - vii. Recreation
 - viii. Public Services and Infrastructure
 - ix. Land Use and Zoning
 - b. Land Based Economies
 - i. Agriculture
 - ii. Forestry
 - iii. Tourism
 - iv. Mining
 - c. Archaeological and Cultural Resources
 - d. Natural Environment
 - i. Air
 - ii. Geology, Soils and Groundwater
 - iii. Surface Water
 - iv. Wetlands
 - v. Vegetation
 - vi. Wildlife
 - vii. Rare and Unique Natural Resources
- VI. Unavoidable Impacts
- VII. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources
- VIII. Relative Merits of Facility Locations

SITES TO BE EVALUATED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The EA will evaluate the 24 facility locations proposed by Aurora in its Site Permit Application (see attached maps). No other locations will be evaluated in the EA.

IDENTIFICATION OF PERMITS

The EA will include a list and description of permits from other government entities that may be required for the proposed project.

ISSUES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The EA for the Aurora Distributed Solar Project will not consider the following:


- A. No-build alternative.
- B. Issues related to Project need, size, type, or timing.
- C. Any site alternative not specifically identified in this scoping decision.
- D. The manner in which land owners are compensated for the sites, as that is outside the jurisdiction of the Commission.

SCHEDULE

The environmental assessment is anticipated to be completed and available in January 2015. A public hearing will be held in the Project area after the environmental assessment has been issued and notice served.

Signed this 4th day of December, 2014

STATE OF MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



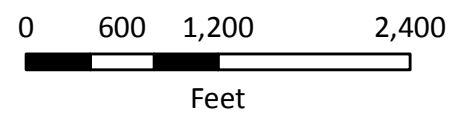
William Grant, Deputy Commissioner

Figure 1
Aurora Distributed Solar Project:
Facilities to be Evaluated in the Environmental Assessment

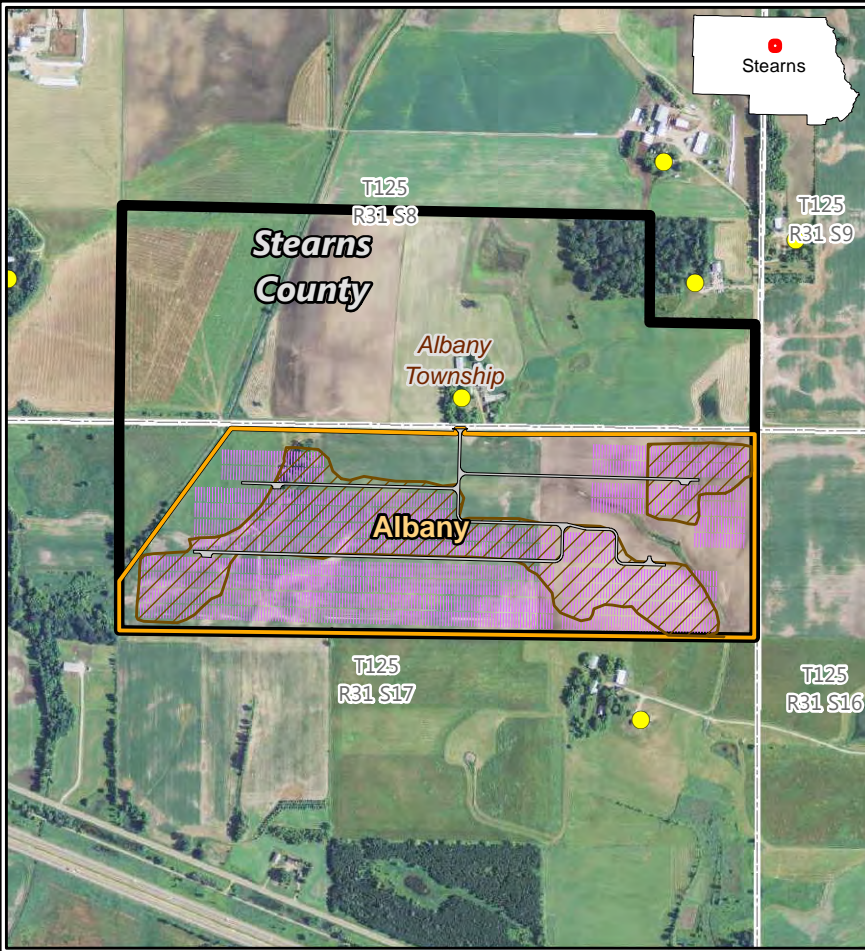
Albany, Annandale, Atwater, Brooten, Chisago, Dodge Center

LEGEND

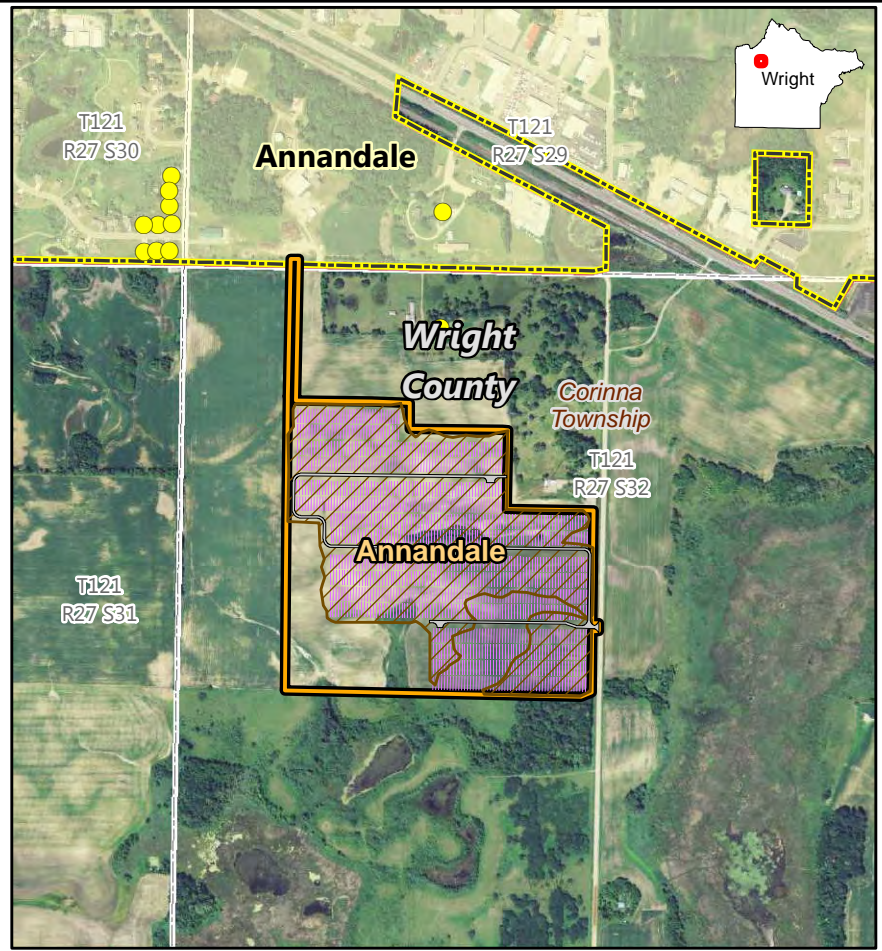
- Residence Location
- Proposed Road
- Proposed Grading Area
- Proposed Arrays
- Preliminary Development Area
- Facility Land Control
- Municipal Boundary
- County Boundary
- Civil Township Boundary
- Public Land Survey Section



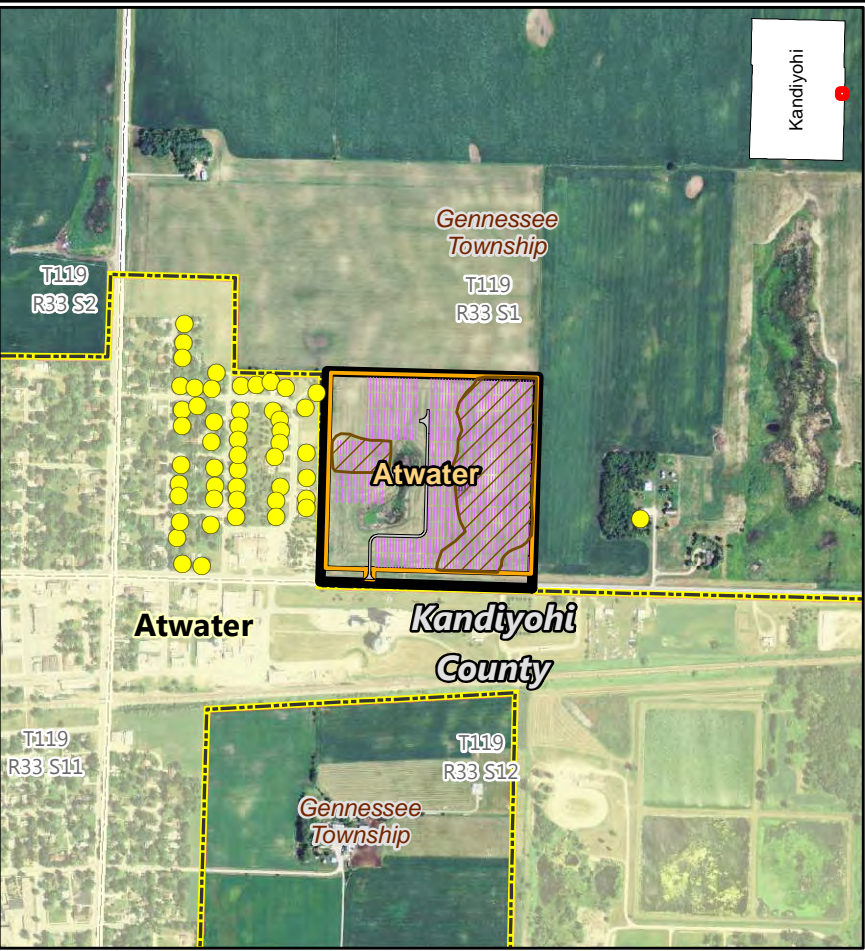
SOURCES:
Geronimo Energy,
Westwood



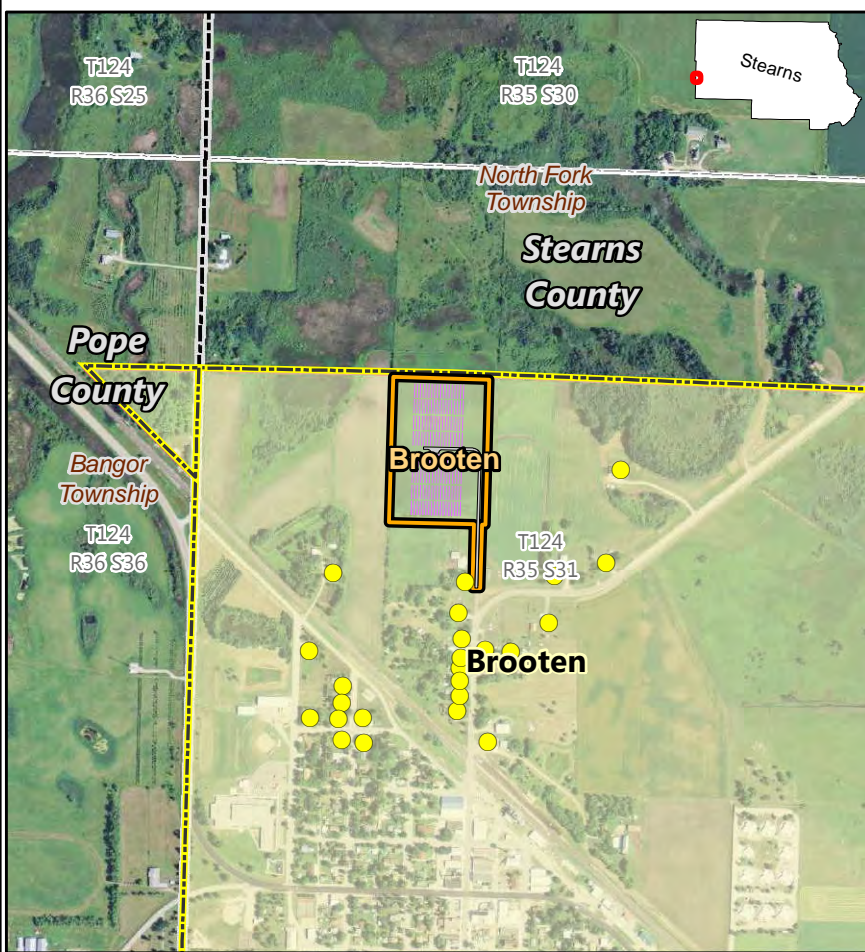
ALBANY FACILITY



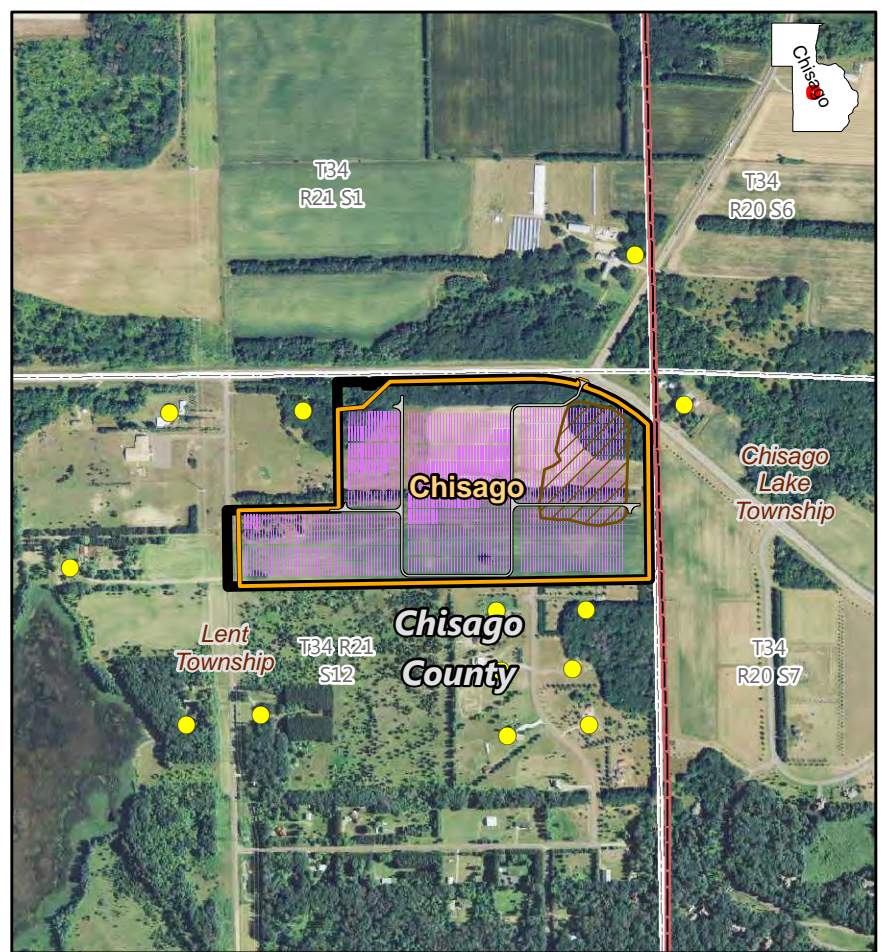
ANNANDALE FACILITY



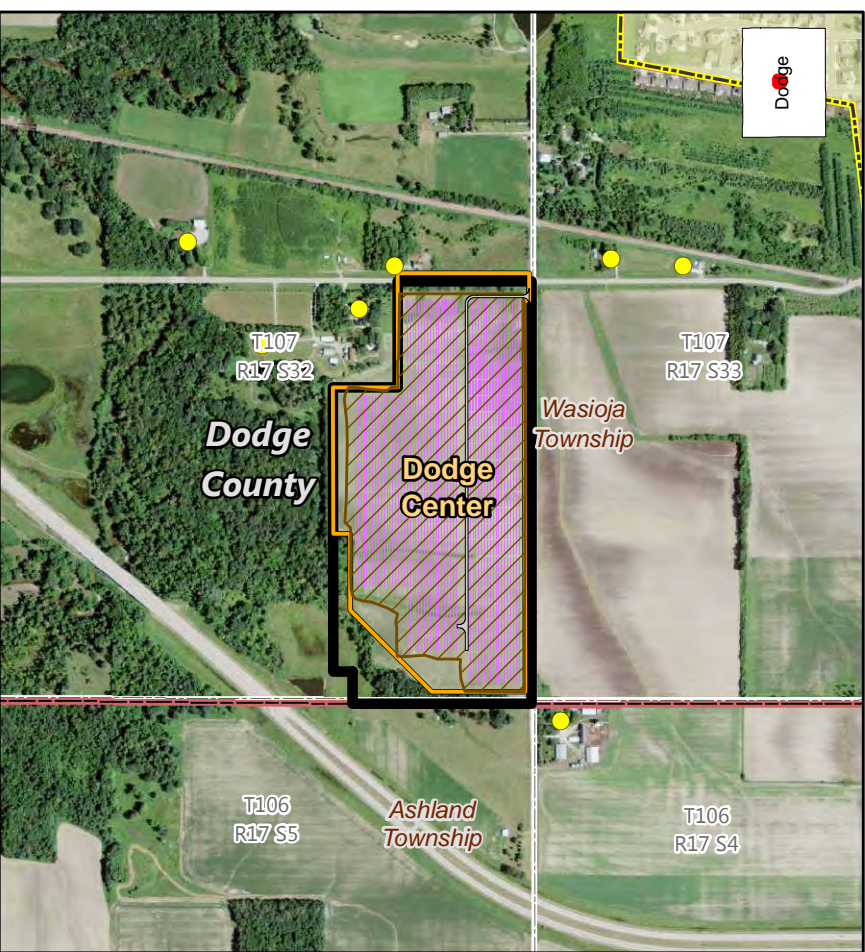
ATWATER FACILITY



BROOTEN FACILITY



CHISAGO FACILITY











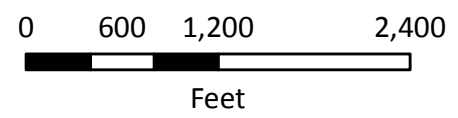
DODGE CENTER FACILITY

Figure 2
Aurora Distributed Solar Project:
Facilities to be Evaluated in the Environmental Assessment

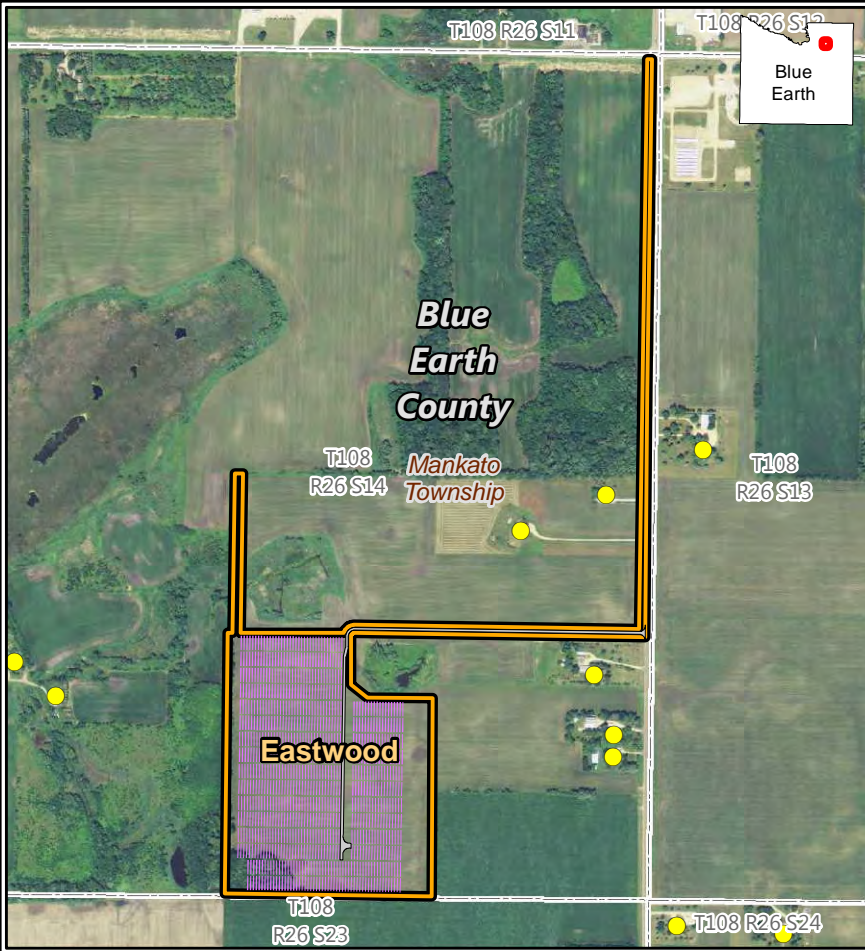
Eastwood, Fiesta City, Hastings, Lake Emily, Lake Pulaski, Lawrence Creek

LEGEND

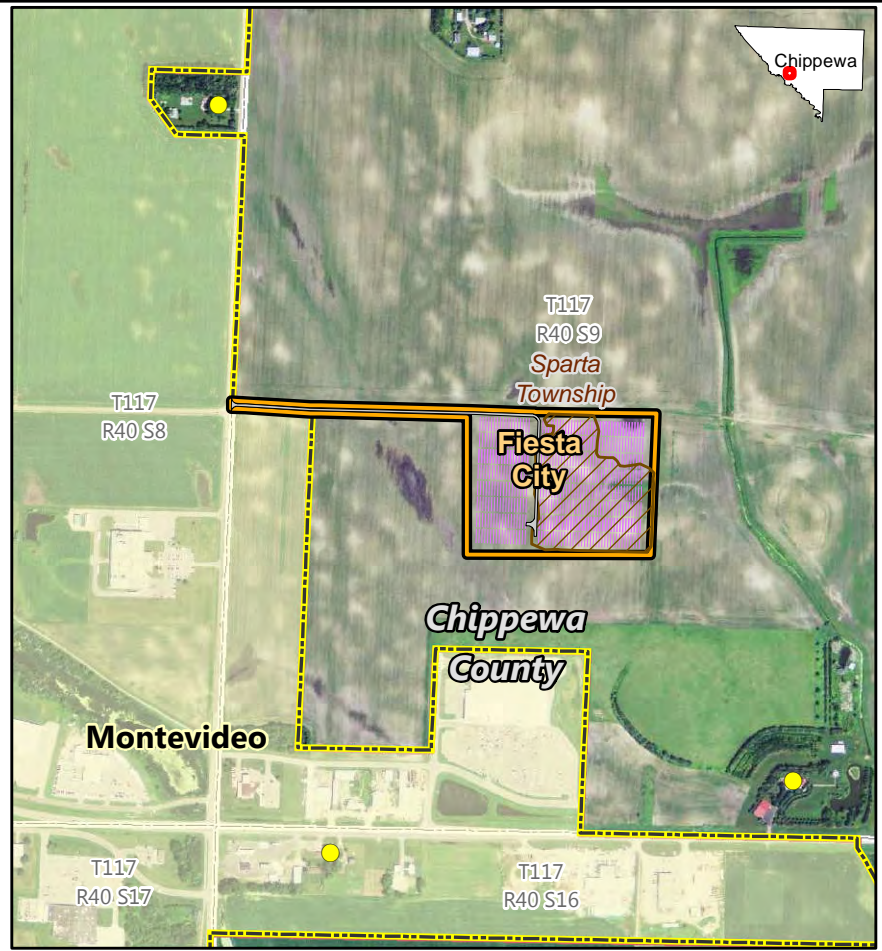
-  Residence Location
-  Proposed Road
-  Proposed Grading Area
-  Proposed Arrays
-  Preliminary Development Area
-  Facility Land Control
-  Municipal Boundary
-  County Boundary
-  Civil Township Boundary
-  Public Land Survey Section



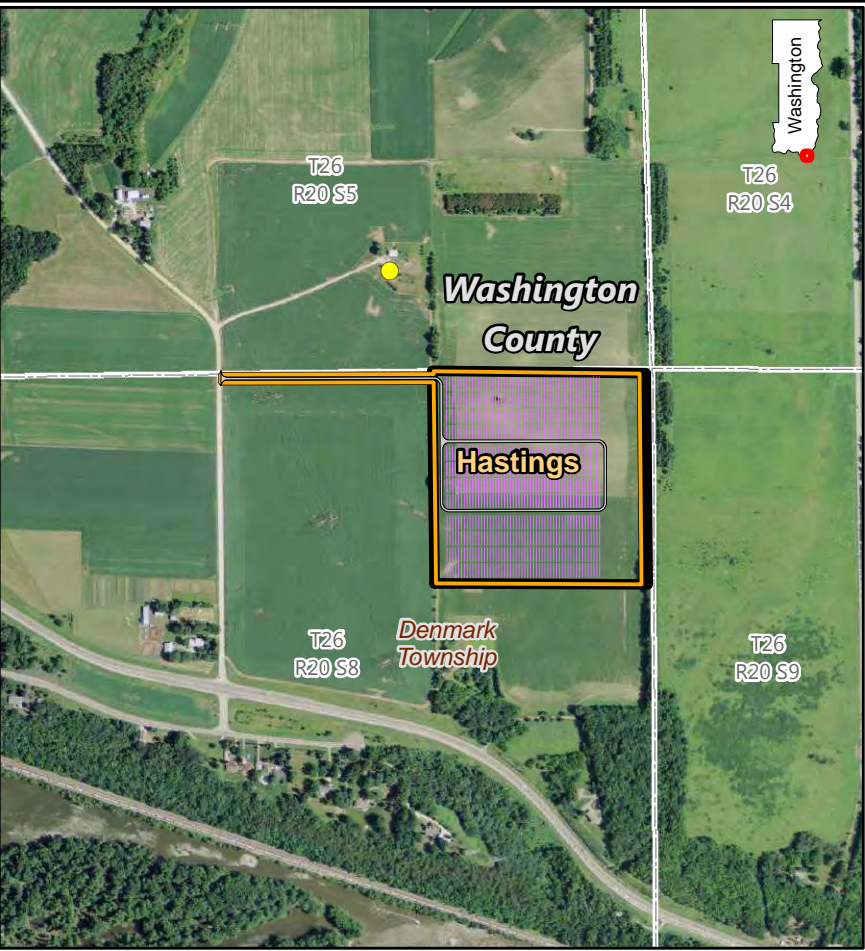
SOURCES:
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Westwood



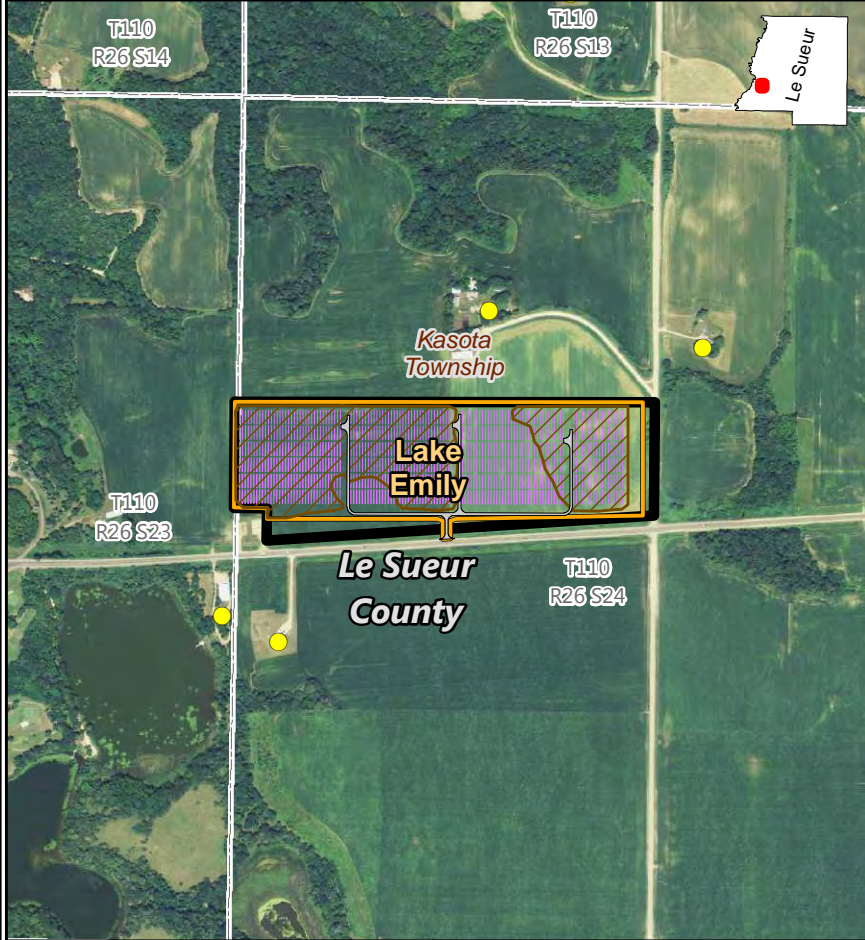
EASTWOOD FACILITY



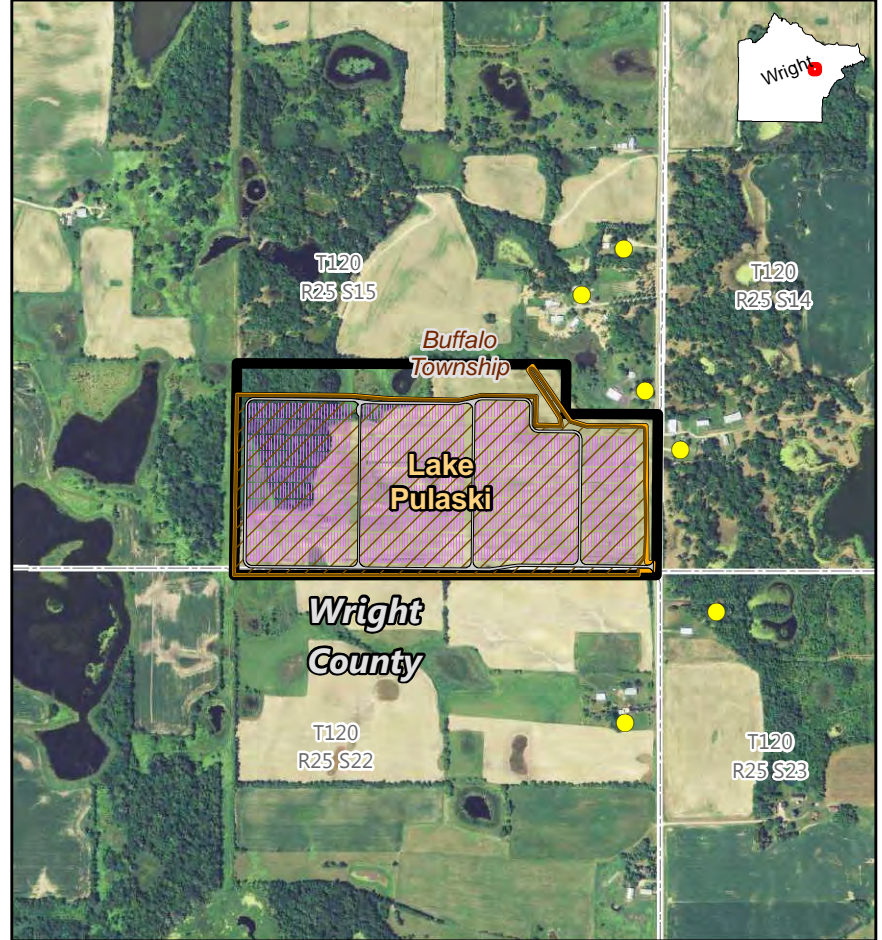
FIESTA CITY FACILITY



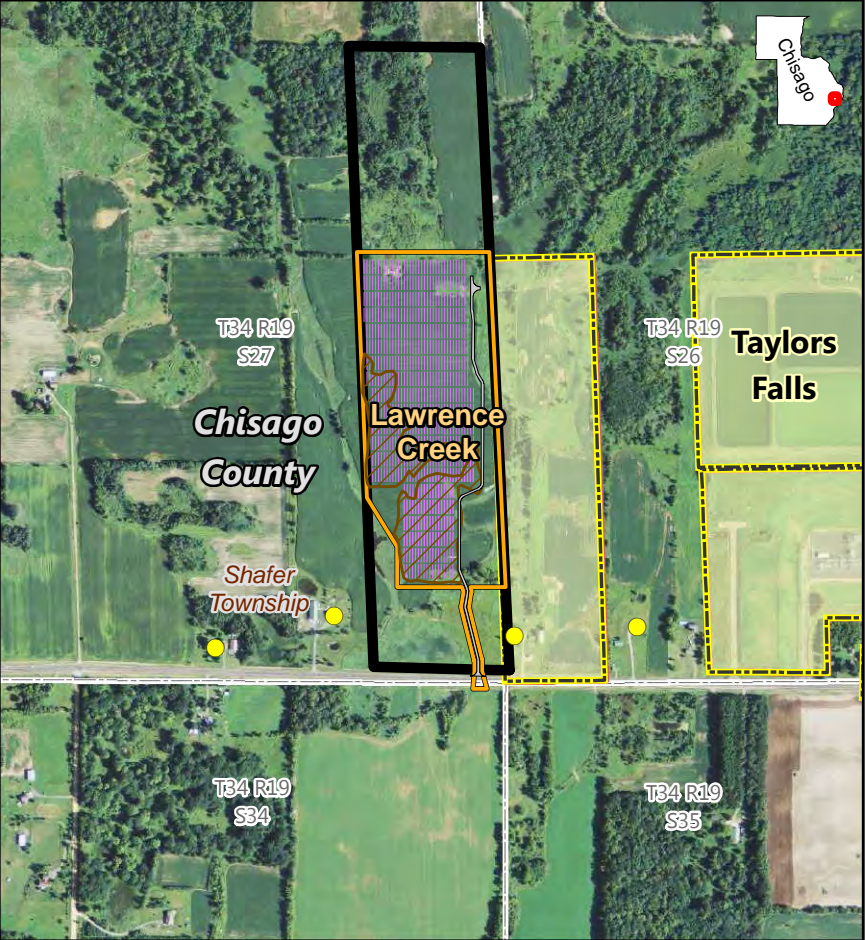
HASTINGS FACILITY



LAKE EMILY FACILITY



LAKE PULASKI FACILITY



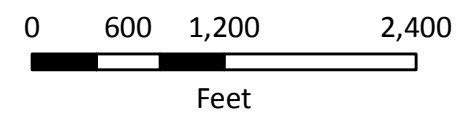
LAWRENCE CREEK FACILITY

Figure 3
Aurora Distributed Solar Project:
Facilities to be Evaluated in the Environmental Assessment

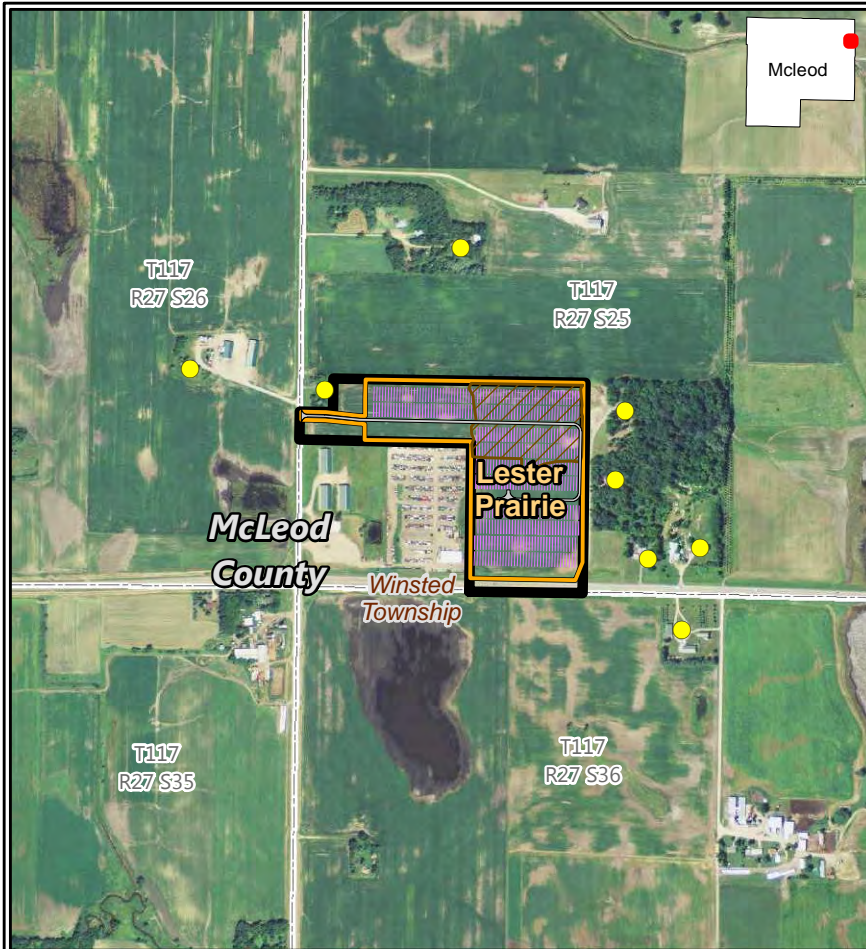
Lester Prairie, Mayhew Lake, Montrose, Paynesville, Pine Island, Pipestone

LEGEND

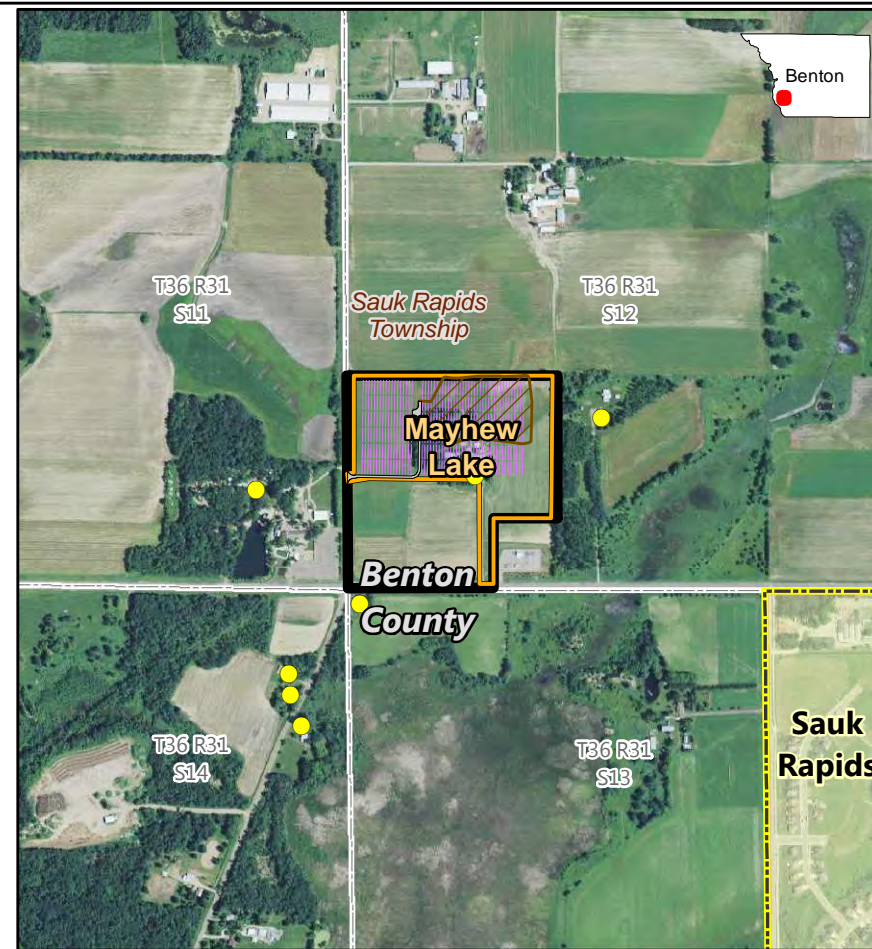
- Residence Location
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- Preliminary Development Area
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- Public Land Survey Section



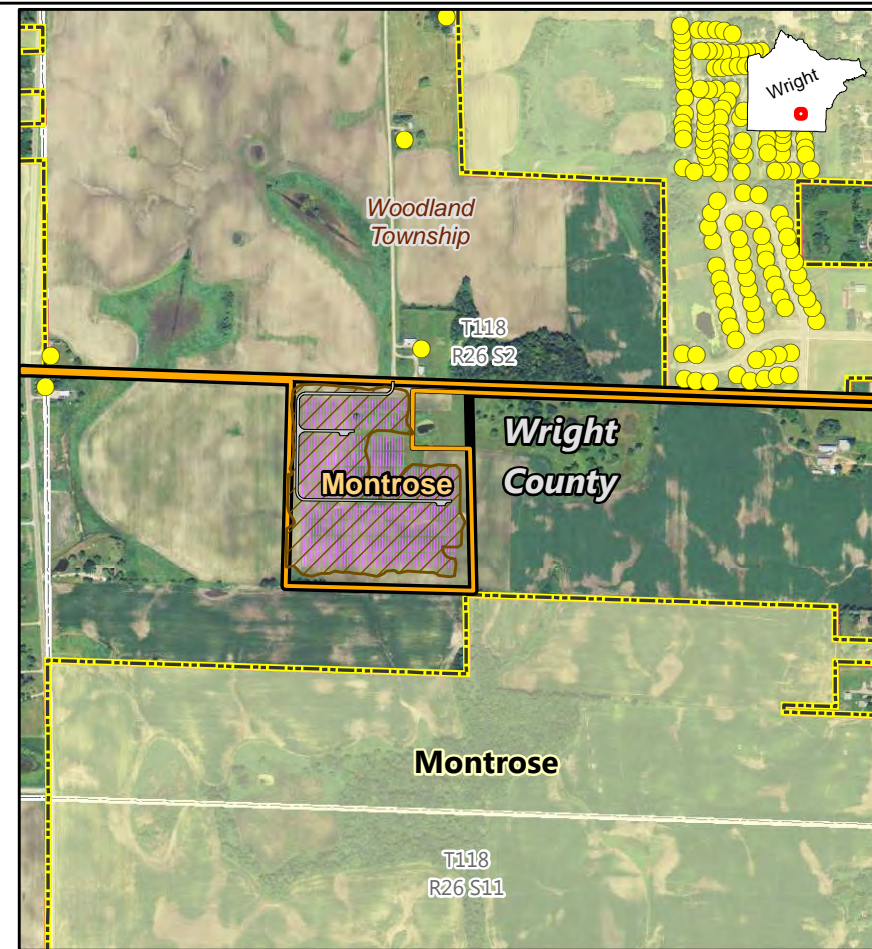
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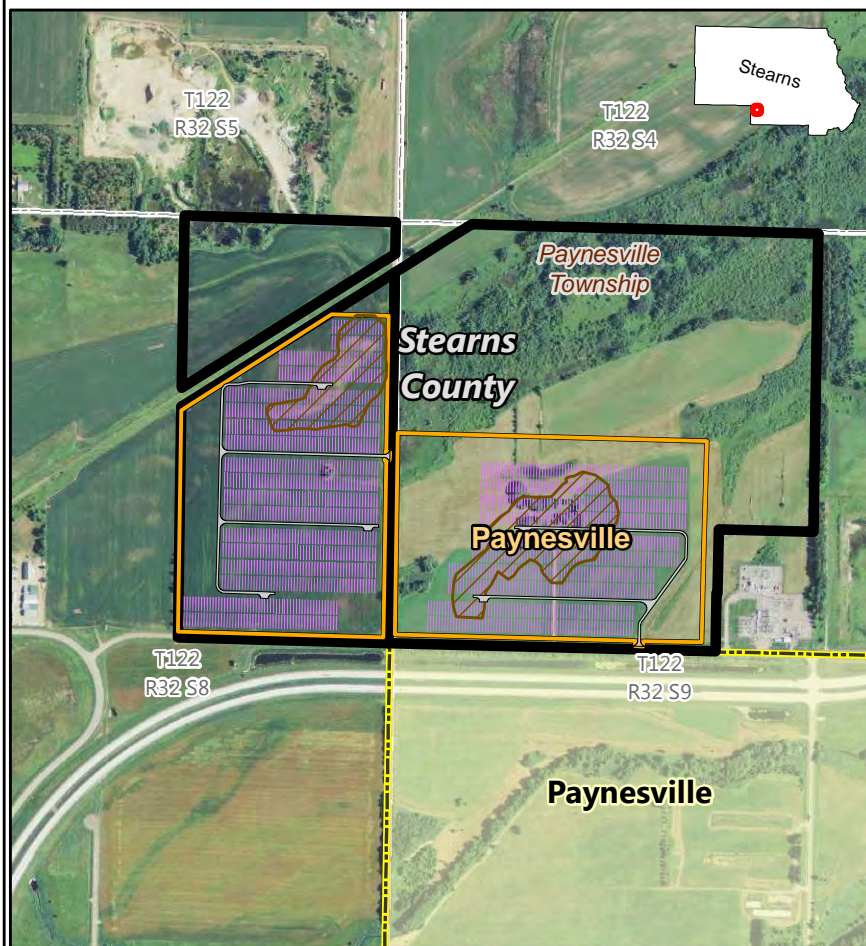
LESTER PRAIRIE FACILITY



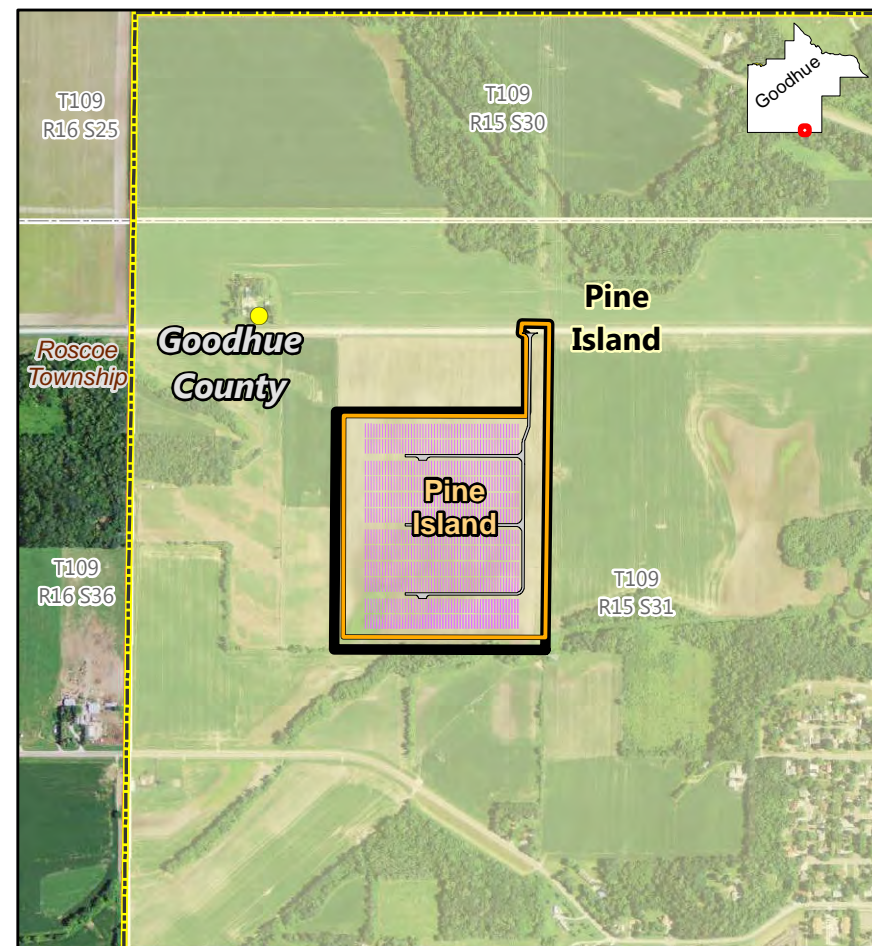
MAYHEW LAKE FACILITY



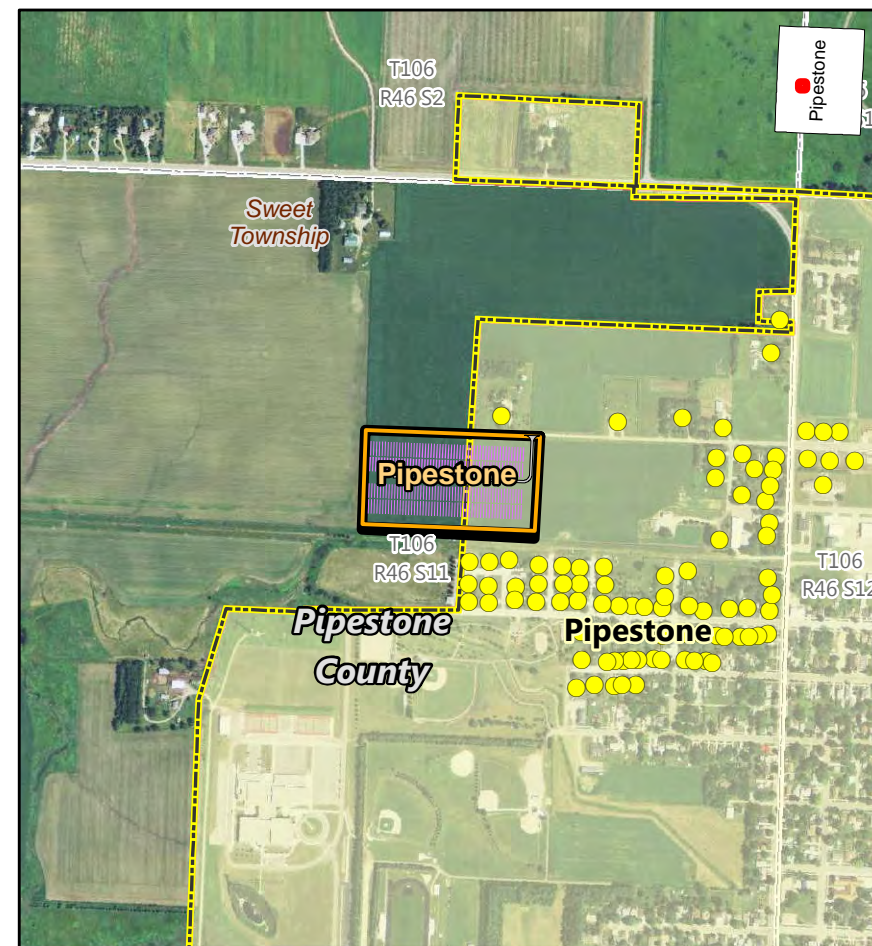
MONTROSE FACILITY



PAYNESVILLE FACILITY



PINE ISLAND FACILITY












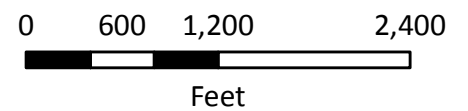
PIPESTONE FACILITY

Figure 4
Aurora Distributed Solar Project:
Facilities to be Evaluated in the Environmental Assessment

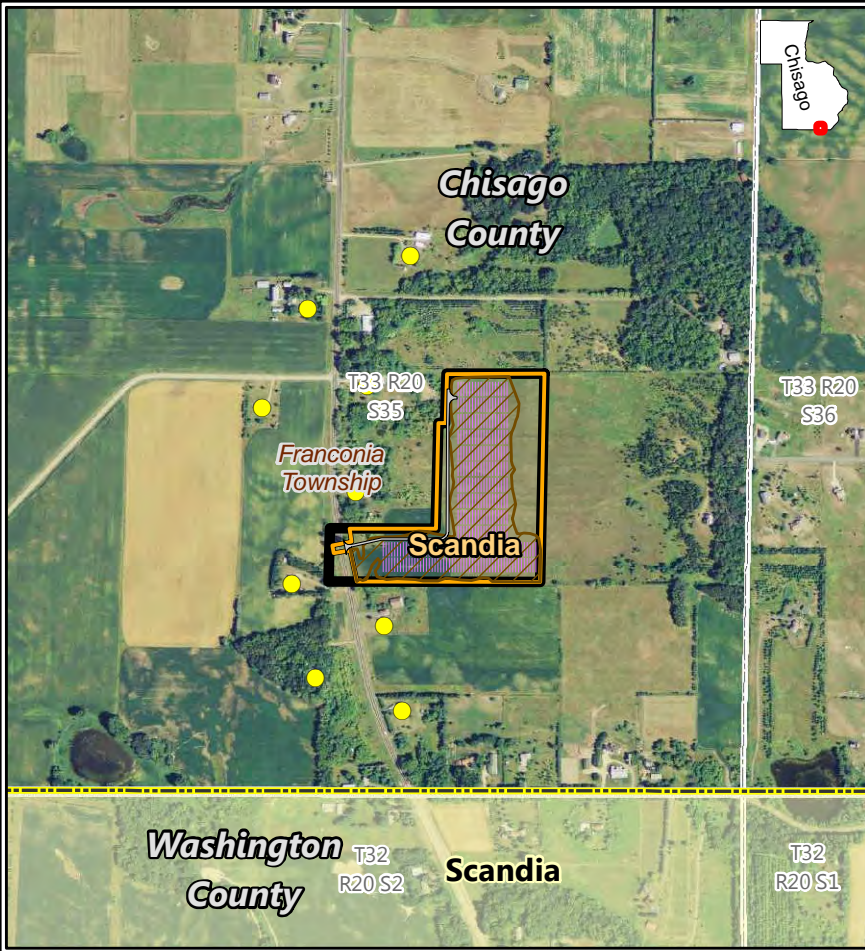
Scandia, Waseca, West Faribault, West Waconia, Wyoming, Zumbrota

LEGEND

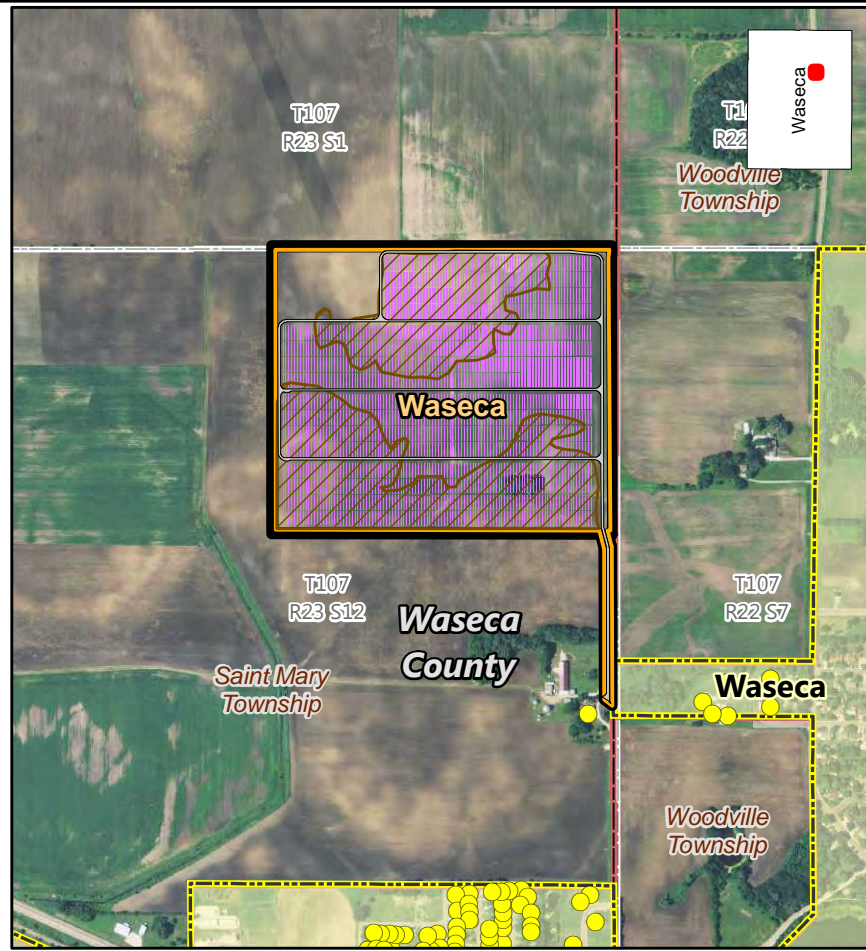
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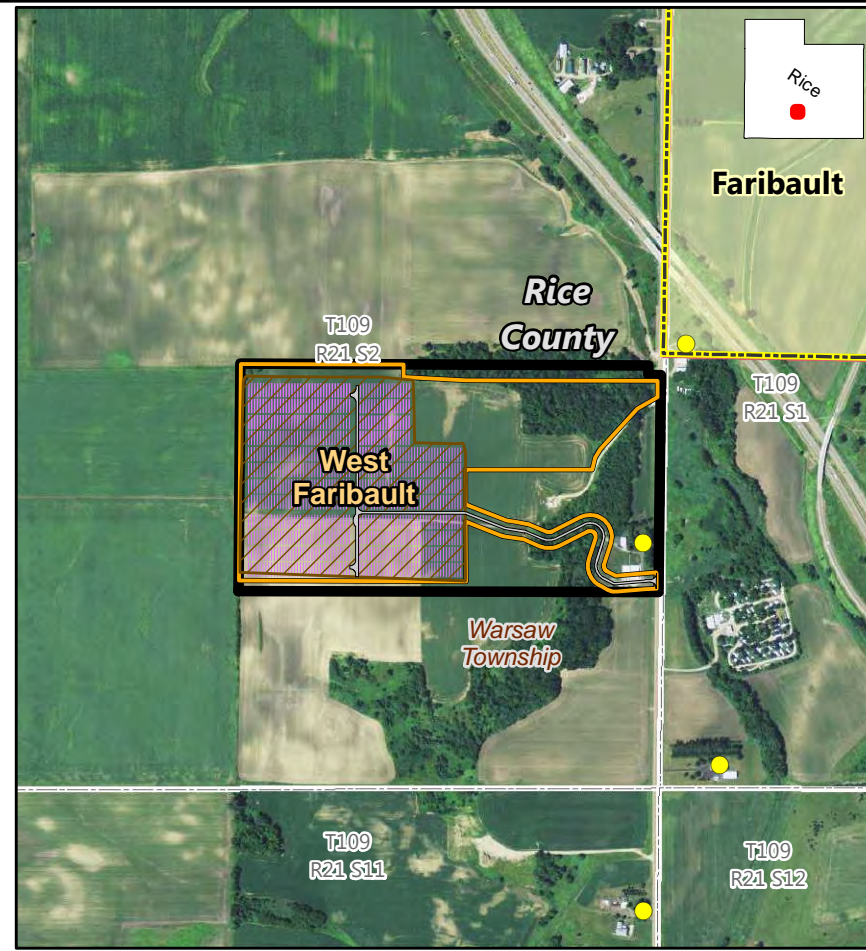
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Westwood



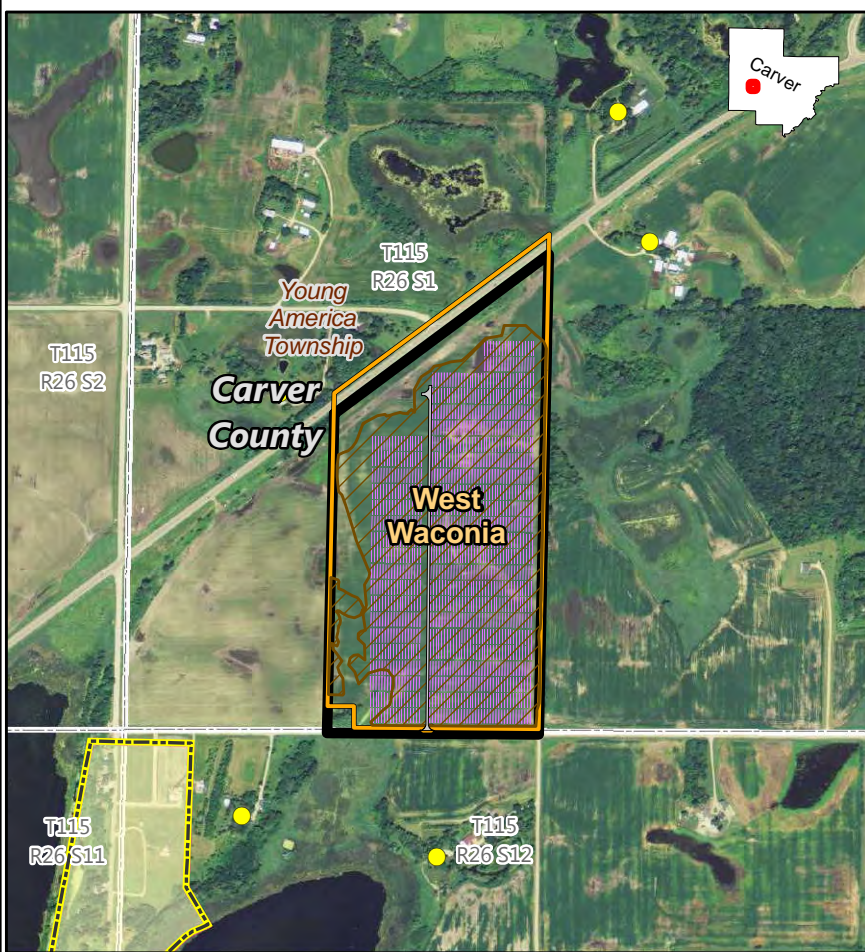
SCANDIA FACILITY



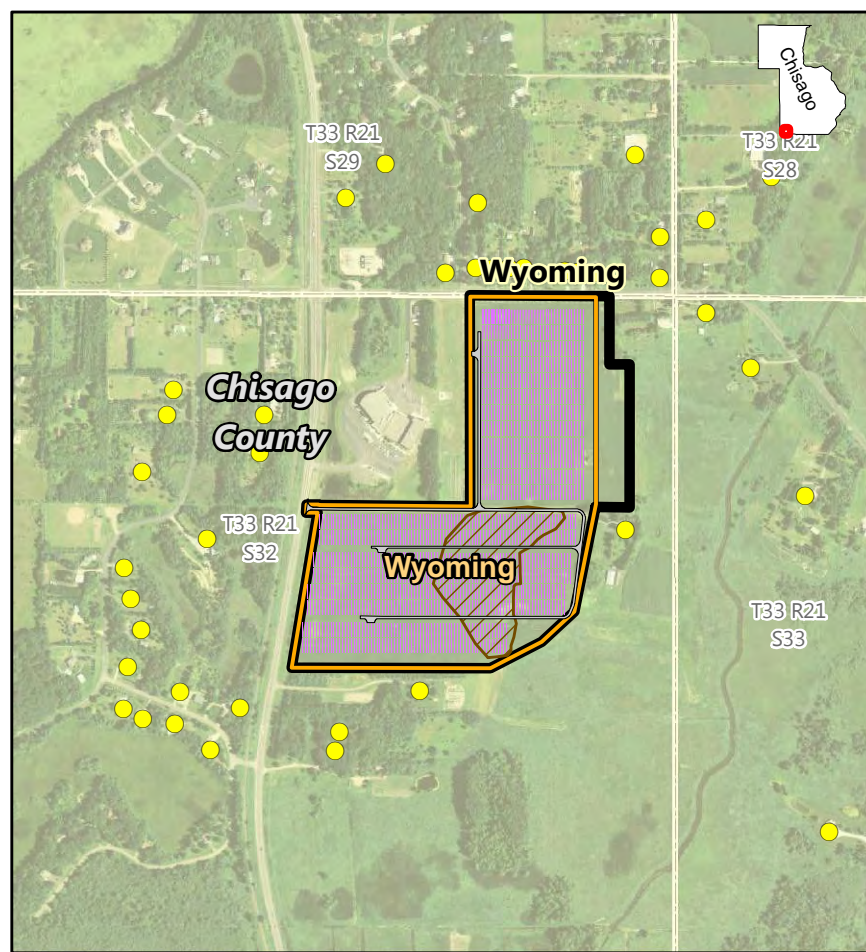
WASECA FACILITY



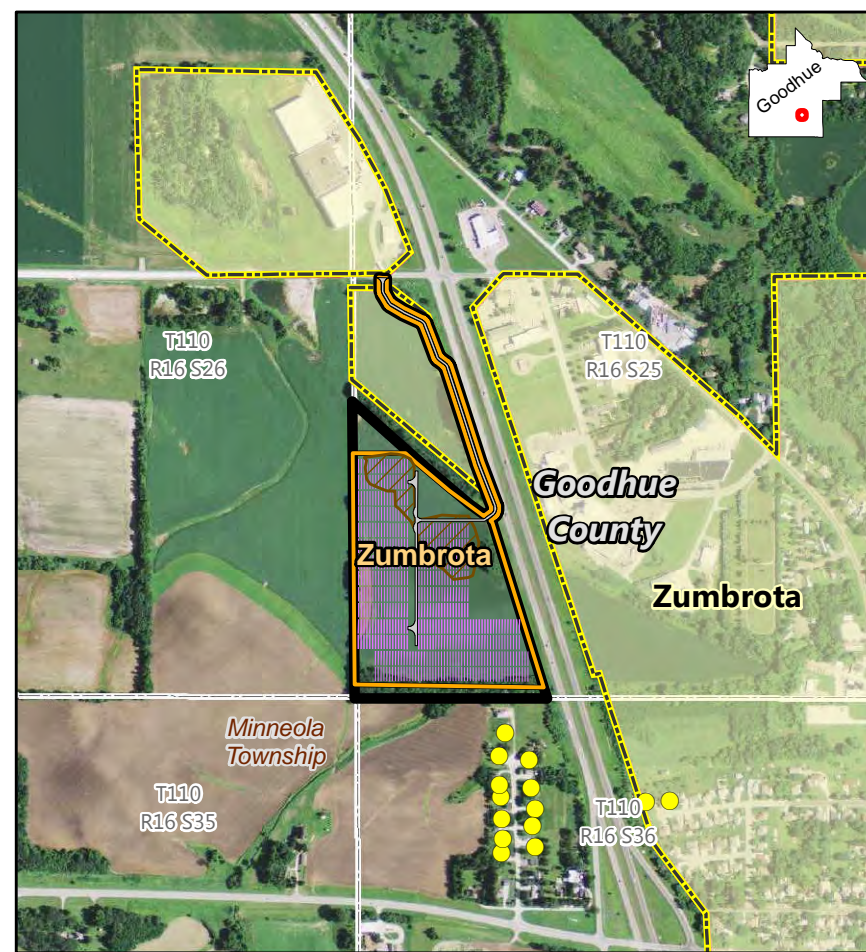
WEST FARIBAULT FACILITY



WEST WACONIA FACILITY



WYOMING FACILITY



ZUMBROTA FACILITY

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Sharon Ferguson, hereby certify that I have this day, served copies of the following document on the attached list of persons by electronic filing, certified mail, e-mail, or by depositing a true and correct copy thereof properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States Mail at St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Minnesota Department of Commerce
Environmental Assessment Scoping Decision**

Docket No. E6928/GS-14-515

Dated this 5th day of December 2014

/s/Sharon Ferguson

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Julia	Anderson	Julia.Anderson@ag.state.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-DOC	1800 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012134	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List
Betsy	Engelking	betsy@geronimoenergy.com	Geronimo Energy	7650 Edinborough Way Suite 725 Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List
Sharon	Ferguson	sharon.ferguson@state.mn.us	Department of Commerce	85 7th Place E Ste 500 Saint Paul, MN 551012198	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List
Burl W.	Haar	burl.haar@state.mn.us	Public Utilities Commission	Suite 350 121 7th Place East St. Paul, MN 551012147	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List
John	Lindell	agorud.ecf@ag.state.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-RUD	1400 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012130	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List
Barbara L.	Neilson	Barbara.Neilson@state.mn.us	Office of Administrative Hearings	PO Box 64620 St. Paul, MN 551640620	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List
David	Post	David.Post@enel.com	Enel Green Power North America	7650 Edinborough Way Ste 725 Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List
Janet	Shaddix Elling	jshaddix@janetshaddix.com	Shaddix And Associates	Ste 122 9100 W Bloomington Frwy Bloomington, MN 55431	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_14-515_Official CC Service List

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Angie	Berg	angie.berg@co.stearns.mn.us	Stearns County	Administration Ctr, Rm 343 705 Courthouse Square St. Cloud, MN 56303	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Kathy	Brockway	kbrockway@co.le-sueur.mn.us	Le Sueur County	88 S Park Ave Le Center, MN 56057	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Erica	Cohrs	cohrs25@gmail.com		1678 Highway 7 Lester Prairie, MN 55354	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Joe	Coolen	N/A		3723 Eaken Ave NE Buffalo, MN 55313	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Melissa	DeVetter	melissa.devetter@co.dodge.mn.us	Dodge County	22 6th St E, Dept 123 Mantorville, MN 55955-2240	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Jon	Eickhoff	N/A	City of Pine Island	250 S Main Street, PO Box 1000 Pine Island, MN 55963	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Daniel	Fogal	danfogal@hotmail.com	Blue Earth County	Mankato Township 19727 Ridge Drive Mankato, MN 56001	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Larry	Gasow	Larry.Gasow@co.mcleod.mn.us	McLeod County	830 E 11th Street Glencoe, MN 55336	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Kristi	Gross	kristi.gross@co.goodhue.mn.us	Goodhue County	509 W 5th St Red Wing, MN 55066	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Debra and Mark	Grussing	N/A		103 S 20th St Montevideo, MN 56265	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Joan	Heredia	joan.heredia@enel.com	Enel Green Power North America, Inc.	3636 Nobel Drive, #475 San Diego, CA 92122	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Sarah	Jewell	sjewell@rwkp.com	Reichert Wenner, P.A.	616 Roosevelt Rd Suite 100 PO Box 1556 St. Cloud, MN 56302-1556	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Jeff	Jones	jrjones@cityofpipestone.com	City of Pipestone	119 2nd Ave SW Pipestone, MN 56164	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Mark	Keicker	N/A		30 Deer Ridge Rd Mankato, MN 56001	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Tom	Kleist	buffalotownship@aol.com	Buffalo Township	3405 56th St NE Buffalo, MN 55313	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Jack	Korthof	N/A		3327 Eaken Avenue NE Buffalo, MN 55313	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Stacy	Kotch	Stacy.Kotch@state.mn.us	MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	395 John Ireland Blvd. St. Paul, MN 55155	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
George	Leary	george.leary@blueearthcountymn.gov	Blue Earth County Planning & Zoning	410 S 5th St Mankato, MN 56001	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Mark	Leiferman	Mark.Leiferman@co.waseca.mn.us	Waseca County	307 N State St Waseca, MN 56093	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Matt	Mangulis	mattmangulis@yahoo.com		21304 594th Ave. Mankato, MN 56001	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
John R and Sharon	Miller	N/A		14985 114th St Norwood Young America, MN 55397	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Roger	Muellner	N/A		24817 Fondant Ave Forest Lake, MN 55025	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Diane	Noll	albanytw@albanytel.com		20933 330 St Albany, MN 56307	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Rick	Olseen	rick.olseen@mail.house.gov	Field and Constituent Service Rep	313 N Main St #103 Center City, MN 55012	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Sean	Riley	N/A	Wright County Planning and Zoning	10 2nd Street NW Buffalo, MN 55313	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Thompson	Rodney and Carol	N/A		17679 635th Street Dodge Center, MN 55927	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Ruth Marie	Rudolph	N/A		5750 Adair Ave N Crystal, MN 55429	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Jeff	Schmidt	N/A		30 Woodview Drive Mankato, MN 56001	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Todd	Schultz	Tschultz@ci.sauk-rapids.mn.us	City of Sauk Rapids	250 SUMMIT AVE N Sauk Rapids, MN 56379	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Steve	Shea	stevejshea@comcast.net		7240 Sunshine Dr Eden Prairie, MN 55346	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Dan and Danielle	Sheild	danisheild@gmail.com		20382 310th Street Shafer, MN 55074	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Shawn	Smith	N/A		494 Jennings Ave NW Annandale, MN 55302	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Dave	Starr	Dave_Starr@CINFIN.com		1012 W 2nd Street Zumbrota, MN 55992	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List
Nick	Vespasiano	nvespasiano@montenews.com	Montevideo News	223 S 1st Street Montevideo, MN 56265	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_14-515_Aurora Solar Project Contact List