

6.3 Atwater

The proposed Atwater facility has a capacity of 4.0 MW AC and is located in Section 1 of Genessee Township in Kandiyohi County. The site is located north and east of the city of Annandale, northeast of the intersection of US Highway 12 and County Road 2. Aurora anticipates that the facility will be accessed through a newly constructed access road off of Pleasant Avenue East. Preliminary plans anticipate a development area of approximately 36 acres within the 40 acres of Aurora’s site control. The facility will be connected to Xcel Energy’s Atwater Substation, located approximately 580 feet west of the facility.

The facility is located within the North-Central Glaciated Plains Section of the Prairie Parkland Province. Land cover within the preliminary development area (Table 16) is dominated by cultivated crops (98 percent) with a small portion of developed residential cover. The preliminary development area avoids the developed area of Atwater, located generally west and south of the facility, but the dominance of agricultural land cover is comparable to the study area around the Atwater Substation (Figure 15).

Table 16: Atwater Facility Land Cover

Land Cover	Control Area		Development Area		Study Area	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Open Water	-	-	-	-	643.4	5.12%
Developed, Open Space	0.1	0.2%	-	-	499.5	3.98%
Developed, Low Intensity	3.1	7.7%	0.8	2.1%	406.4	3.24%
Developed, Medium Intensity	0.4	1.0%	0.1	0.2%	232.5	1.9%
Developed, High Intensity	-	-	-	-	30.0	0.2%
Barren Land	-	-	-	-	1.1	0.0%
Deciduous Forest	-	-	-	-	201.0	1.6%
Evergreen Forest	-	-	-	-	11.4	0.1%
Mixed Forest	-	-	-	-	1.2	-
Shrub/Scrub	-	-	-	-	43.0	0.3%
Grassland Herbaceous	-	-	-	-	21.8	0.2%
Pasture/Hay	-	-	-	-	852.9	6.8%
Cultivated Crops	36.6	91.2%	35.4	97.7%	9,426.4	75.1%
Woody Wetlands	-	-	-	-	79.8	0.6%
Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands	-	-	-	-	107.9	0.9%
Totals	40.1	100.0%	36.3	100.0%	12,558.2	100.0%

6.3.1 Effects on Human Settlement

The location is a cultivated parcel at the edge of Atwater, in a transition area between the city and surrounding rural land uses. The nearest home is located approximately 180 feet west of the preliminary development area, in a residential neighborhood located

immediately to the west of the proposed facility. Construction of the facility will not result in displacement of any homes or businesses. The facility is located in an area zoned by Kandiyohi County as A-1, Agricultural Preservation District. Solar farms are a conditional use in the A-1 zoning classification.⁹³ The site is not subject to an orderly annexation agreement.

A snowmobile trail is the only identified recreational use located within one-half mile of the proposed facility. Construction and operation of the facility would not impact the use of nearby recreational resources.

The Atwater facility's proximity to the nearby residential neighborhood (see Figure 14) would mean that the aesthetic impacts to nearby housing is likely to be noticeable. Development of a landscaping plan, as identified in Section 5.2.7, could minimize visual impacts to the residential area west of the facility.

6.3.2 Effects on Land Based Economies

The proposed facility would remove approximately 35 acres from agricultural use. EERA staff is not aware of any other solar facilities have been announced in the area of the proposed facility, so there is no indication that the conversion of land from agricultural uses would be part of a cumulative reduction of available land for crops or pasture.

Within the preliminary development area, approximately 29 acres (81 percent) are considered to be prime farmland and 4 acres (11 percent) are considered to be prime farmland if drained (Table 13). Approximately 52 percent of the comparison area in the 2.5 mile buffer around the Atwater Substation meets the definition of prime farmland or prime farmland if drained. In order to avoid the developed area around Atwater, it is likely that any alternate locations would also be sited on prime farmland or prime farmland if drained, although there are areas of farmland of statewide importance located southeast of Atwater (Figure 17).

The proposed project would not impact tourism, mining or mineral extraction activity, or forest resources of economic importance.

No mitigation measures beyond those described in Section 5.3 are identified for the Atwater facility.

6.3.3 Effects on Archaeological and Historic Resources

No archaeological sites were identified in a survey of the Atwater facility. No mitigation measures beyond those described in Section 5.4 are identified for the Atwater facility.

⁹³ Kandiyohi County Comments

6.3.4 Effects on Natural Environment

There are no rivers, streams or lakes within the area of facility site control. Field delineations performed in the summer of 2014 show approximately 2.8 acres of wetlands within the preliminary development area; 0.39 acres of Type 1 (seasonally flooded basins or floodplains and 2.42 acres of Type 2 (wet meadow).⁹⁴

The preliminary design for the facility anticipates grading of approximately 14.5 acres of the site during construction.⁹⁵

No mitigation measures beyond those described in Section 5.5 are identified for the Atwater facility.

6.3.5 Effects on Rare and Unique Natural Resources

A review of the NHIS database did not identify any documented instances of state or federally listed endangered, threatened or special concern species within one mile of the area of site control for the Atwater facility⁹⁶.

No mitigation measures beyond the field survey described in Section 5.6 are identified for the Atwater facility.

⁹⁴ Appendix C

⁹⁵ Application, at Appendix F

⁹⁶ Application, at p. 81

Figure 14: Atwater Project Detail

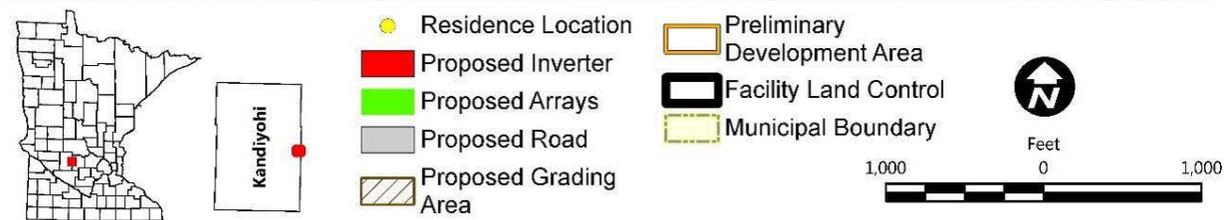


Figure 15: Atwater Land Cover Overview

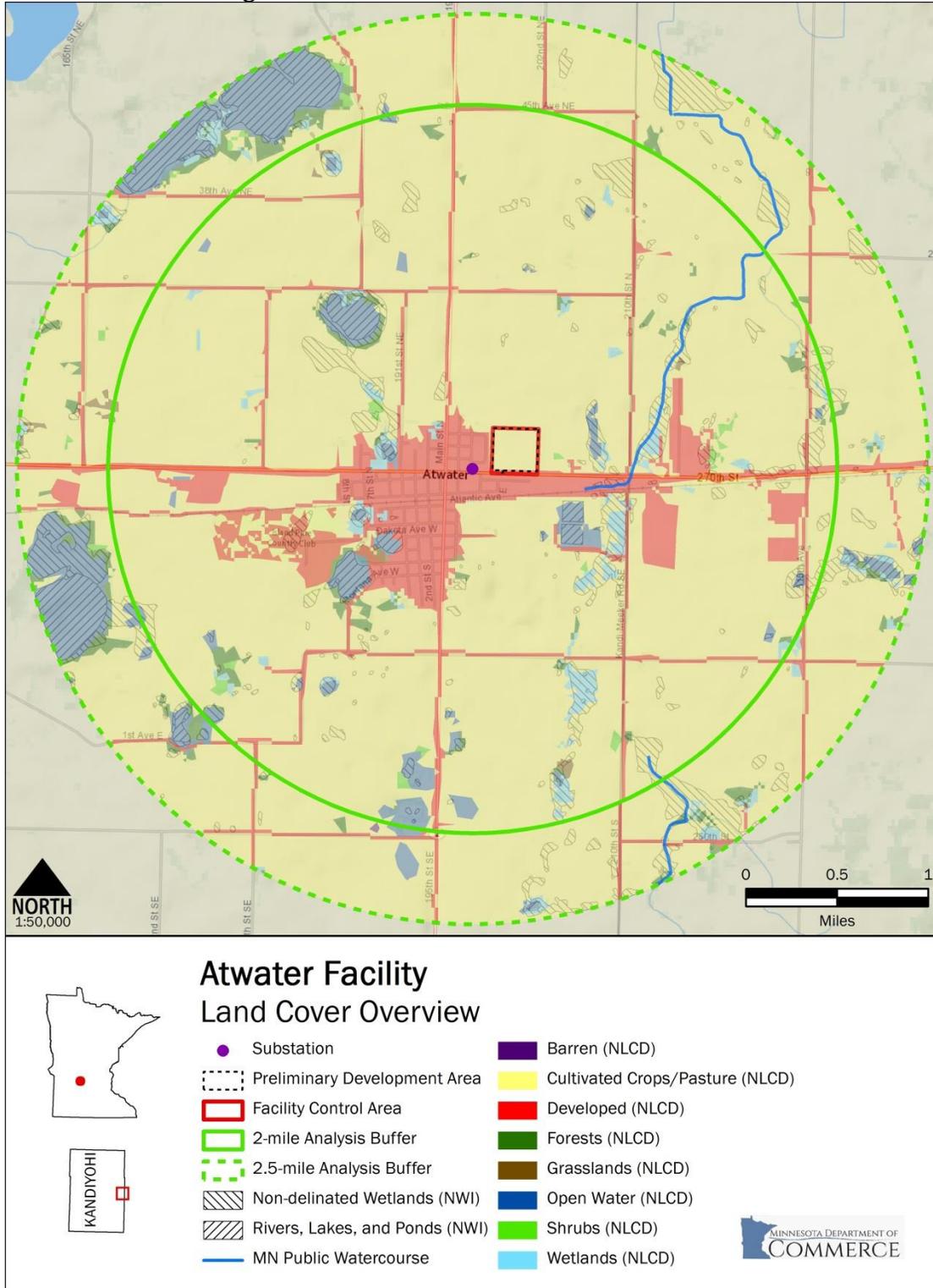
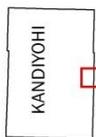
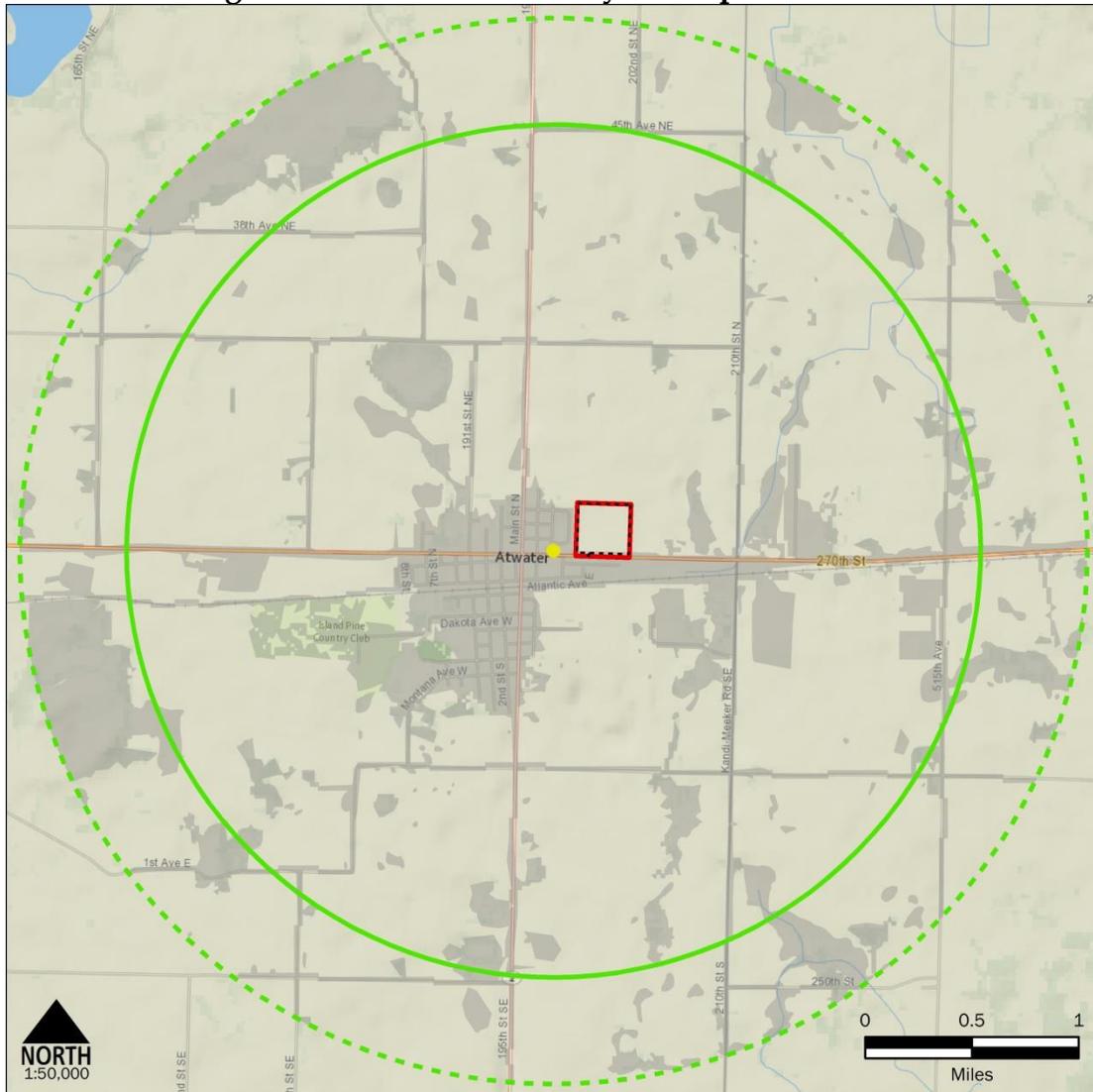


Figure 16: Atwater Generally Incompatible Areas



**Atwater Facility
 Generally Incompatible Areas**

- Substation
- Preliminary Development Area
- Facility Control Area
- 2-mile Analysis Buffer
- 2.5-mile Analysis Buffer
- Generally Incompatible Areas

“Generally Incompatible Areas” include: Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas; Minnesota Wildlife Management Areas; US Fish and Wildlife Service Waterfowl Production Areas; the National Wetland Inventory; and areas classified as open water, developed, forest, and wetland in the National Land Cover Database.



Figure 17: Atwater Prime Farmland and Other Areas

