

1.0 Introduction

Aurora Distributed Solar, LLC (Aurora) has made an application to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) for a site permit for the proposed 100 MW Aurora Distributed Solar Project. The permit application was made pursuant to Minn. Statutes Section 216E and Minnesota Rules Chapter 7850.

Aurora proposes to construct 100 MW of photovoltaic (PV) solar generation at up to 24 locations in 16 counties. The proposed power plant locations range in nameplate capacity from 1.5 to 10 megawatts (MW). Preliminary estimates of developed area range from approximately 13 to 108 acres. The project is proposed to be located in Benton, Blue Earth, Carver, Chippewa, Chisago, Dodge, Goodhue, Kandiyohi, Le Sueur, McLeod, Pipestone, Rice, Stearns, Waseca, Washington, and Wright counties.

The Department of Commerce (Department) Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) staff is tasked with conducting environmental review on applications for site permits before the Commission. The intent of the environmental review process is to inform the public, the applicant, and decision-makers about potential impacts and possible mitigation measures for the proposed project.

This environmental assessment (EA) addresses the issues noted in Minnesota Rule 7850.3700, subpart 4, and those identified in the Department’s scoping decision for this project (Appendix A), and is organized as follows:

Section 1.0	Introduction	The introduction provides an overview of this document and of the proposed project.
Section 2.0	Regulatory Framework	Section 2.0 describes the regulatory framework associated with the project.
Section 3.0	Proposed Project	Section 3.0 describes the project as proposed by Aurora, including PV Arrays, roads and the electrical system.
Section 4.0	Alternative Sites	Section 4.0 describes sites considered and rejected, and any alternative sites that were developed through the EA scoping process.
Section 5.0	Potential Impacts of Proposed Project	Section 5.0 details the potential impacts of the proposed 100 MW project to human and natural environments and identifies measures that could be implemented to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse impacts

Section 6.0	Potential Impacts by Facility	Section 6.0 details the potential impacts of the individual facilities to human and natural environments and identifies measures that could be implemented to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse impacts.
Section 7.0	Application of Siting Factors	Section 7.0 applies the information and data available in the record to date to those factors described in Minnesota Rule 7850.4100.

1.1 Project Description

Aurora proposes to construct a combination of PV solar energy conversion system (solar arrays, roads, electrical collection and interconnection system) totaling 100 Megawatts (MW) at up to 24 locations in Benton, Blue Earth, Carver, Chippewa, Chisago, Dodge, Goodhue, Kandiyohi, Le Sueur, McLeod, Pipestone, Rice, Stearns, Waseca, Washington, and Wright counties. Proposed facility locations are shown in Figure 1. Table 1 provides summary information of the proposed facilities based on preliminary project design. The final project design may result in changes to the anticipated size of individual facilities, either in MW output or development acreage.

1.2 Project Purpose

Aurora proposes to construct the project to provide distributed solar energy to meet Xcel Energy's needs for additional capacity in the 2017 to 2019 timeframe. As a result of a competitive resource acquisition process to select resources to meet Xcel Energy's identified need, the Commission directed Xcel Energy to negotiate a draft power purchase agreement with the Project.

1.3 Sources of Information

Much of the information used in this EA is derived from documents prepared by Aurora, including the Site Permit Application (Application), Facility Fact Sheets and responses to questions from EERA staff. In addition to material provided by Aurora, information from scoping comments and from EERA's GIS analysis of the facilities and their surrounding areas was used to prepare this document.

Figure 1: Aurora Distributed Solar Project Proposed Facility Locations

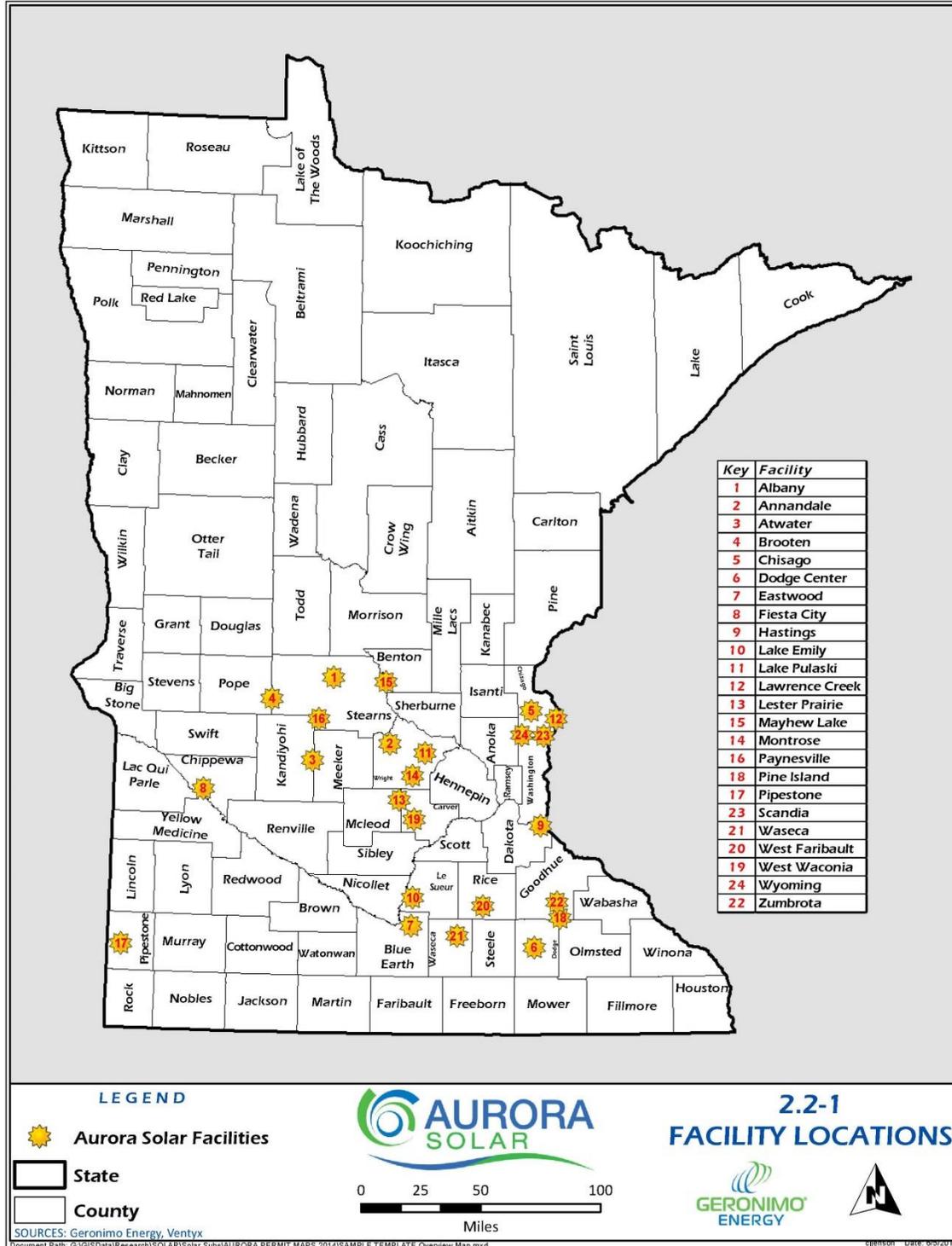


Table 1. Project Locations

Facility	County	Township/Range/Section	Facility Land Control (acres)	Preliminary Development Area (acres)	Anticipated MW-AC
Albany	Stearns	Sections 8 & 17, T 125N, R 31W	230.6	107.4	10.0
Annandale	Wright	Section 32, T 121N, R 27W	70.6	70.6	6.0
Atwater	Kandiyohi	Section 1, T 119N, R 33W	40.1	36.3	4.0
Brooten	Stearns	Section 31, T 124N, R 35W	13.0	13.0	1.5
Chisago	Chisago	Section 12, T 34N, R 21W	62.4	60.6	7.5
Dodge Center	Dodge	Section 32, T 107N, R 17W	68.5	60.0	6.5
Eastwood	Blue Earth	Section 14, T 108N, R 66W	49.7	49.7	5.5
Fiesta City	Chippewa	Section 9, T 117N, R 40 W	25.6	25.6	2.5
Hastings	Washington	Section 8, T 26N, R 20W	40.6	40.6	5.0
Lake Emily	Le Sueur	Section 24, T 110N, R 26W	46.9	42.4	5.0
Lake Pulaski	Wright	Section 15, T 120N, R 25W	75.8	63.2	8.5
Lawrence Creek	Chisago	Section 27, T 34N, R 19W	74.3	39.4	4.0
Lester Prairie	McLeod	Section 25, T 117N, R 27W	29.9	26.0	3.5
Mayhew Lake	Benton	Section 12, T 36N, R 31W	36.0	21.8	4.0
Montrose	Wright	Section 2, T 118N, R 26W	37.7	34.8	4.0
Paynesville	Stearns	Section 4, 8 & 9, T 122N, R 32W	223.6	108.4	10.0
Pine Island	Goodhue	Section 31, T109N, R 15W	46.9	42.2	4.0
Pipestone	Pipestone	Section 11, T106N, R 46W	15.8	14.7	2.0
Scandia	Chisago	Section 35, T 33N, R 20W	24.4	23.3	2.5
Waseca	Waseca	Section 12, T 17N, R 23W	89.2	85.2	10.0
West Faribault	Rice	Section 2, T 109N, R 21W	85.5	59.4	5.5
West Waconia*	Carver	Section 1, T 115N, R 26W	75.7	78.1	8.5
Wyoming	Chisago	Section 32, T 33N, R 21W	67.3	62.0	7.0
Zumbrota	Goodhue	Section 25, T 110N, R 16W	35.6	31.9	3.5
* Preliminary Development Area boundary is larger than the Facility Land Control boundary in this particular instance to accommodate possible interconnection in the public right-of-way on the north side of Highway 5/25.					