Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

Summer Strand, Chairperson
Kristy Nieto, Commissioner
Marcus Hawkins, Commissioner

4822 Madison Yards Way
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854

October 1, 2025

Re: Application of Akron Solar, LLC for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Construct a Solar Electric Generation Facility Capable of Generating up to 200 MW, a Collector Substation, a Generation Tie Line, and a BESS in the Town of Rome in Adams County and the Town of Saratoga in Wood County, Wisconsin

9832-CE-100

To the Person Addressed:

On April 9, 2025, the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) received an application from Akron Solar, LLC (the applicant) to receive a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) for the authority to construct and place in service a new solar electric generation facility, battery energy storage system (BESS), generation-tie line, and associated facilities. The proposed project would be located in the Town of Rome in Adams County and the Town of Saratoga in Wood County, Wisconsin. The Commission is sending this letter to property owners near the proposed project facilities, as well as individuals who have asked to be placed on our mailing list. It is also being sent to public officials who may wish to place this notification in a location where it can be viewed by the public.

The project is a Type II action under Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 4.10(2). It requires the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) to determine if an environmental impact statement (EIS) is necessary under Wis. Stat. § 1.11. Commission and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff completed an environmental review of the proposed project and prepared an EA to determine if an EIS was necessary. The EA is written following the guidelines in Wis. Admin. Code PSC 4.20 and is a review of the potential environmental effects of the proposed project that would affect the quality of the human environment as described in Wis. Stat. § 1.11(2)(c). The EA also describes ways of mitigating or avoiding some of the expected impacts and concludes with the evaluation of ten items described in Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 4.20(2)(d). A notification of the Commission's intent to prepare an EA, including a solicitation for comments on the environmental aspects of this project, was mailed to landowners, local and regional media, affected municipal entities, the regional planning commission, and area legislators in the project area on May 13, 2025, and an updated notification was mailed on June 6, 2025.

The preliminary determination indicates that no significant impacts on the human or natural environment are likely to occur as a result of the construction and operation of this project. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required. Comments regarding this determination can be directed to the contact person listed at the end of this letter. The remainder of this letter describes the primary impacts of the project and summarizes the conclusions of the EA. To obtain a copy of the EA, please request a copy from the contact person listed at the end of this letter.

Proposed Project

The applicant is proposing a 200 megawatt (MW) photovoltaic (PV) solar electric generation facility, as well as a 200 MW BESS. The project would be constructed on 1,691 acres of land. The proposed primary solar arrays and associated facilities are located on approximately 1,347 acres, with another 344 acres available for consideration as alternative array locations. The major components of the proposed project include PV panels, BESS units, inverters, approximately 24.6 miles of underground 34.5 kilovolt (kV) collector circuits for primary and alternate arrays, a new 138 kV substation, a new permanent operation and maintenance building, and a new 138kV generation-tie line that would be approximately 1.8 miles long for the proposed route and 1.9 miles long for the alternate route.

Arrays and BESS units are proposed to be located on primarily commercial forestry land that would be cleared prior to construction. The generation-tie line would run through a corridor of primarily forested land to connect the project substation to a new American Transmission Company (ATC) switchyard that would be constructed separately. An interactive web-map of the project is located at the PSC website's Highlighted Case page for Akron Solar.[1]

Potential Natural Resource and Social Impacts

The proposed project would cause environmental impacts based on the surrounding land use, habitats, and features, such as historic resources. During construction activities, there would be increased noise, dust, and vibration in the construction areas. Pile drivers installing steel supports for the project would be one source of noise during construction, based on the location of work. There would be increased traffic in the project area as employees and deliveries come and go from the project work areas. The fences surrounding the proposed arrays would impact recreational and wildlife use of the area although the fences could either have larger openings or be raised 6 inches off the ground to allow for small wildlife movement. Some recreational trails (snowmobile and ATV) would be closed or rerouted for the operational life of the project. A visual change in the project area from commercial red pine forest to a more industrial landscape of fencing and rows of solar panels would affect individual viewers differently, depending on a number of factors. Vegetation screening would be used to reduce the visual impact of the project from public roadways and other vantage points.

Construction in and through commercial forests would result in both temporary and long-term impacts. Tree and shrub clearing would be required in the proposed project area. Because the project area is comprised of commercial red pine plantation for pulpwood production, clearing in this area would result in fewer environmental impacts than in a mature, diverse upland forest. The areas hosting the solar PV arrays, new collector substation, operations and maintenance (O&M) building, and other associated facilities would be out of commercial forestry production for the operational life of the project (estimated 30 years). Loose or disturbed soils after clearing or during construction could be susceptible to erosion or the establishment of invasive plant species. Animals and vegetation in the project area could be displaced or damaged because of construction activities. All the arrays and the substation would be fenced. The substation would have chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. The solar arrays would use seven- to eight-foot-high wildlife-friendly fencing,

[1] Available at: https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/CommissionActions/CasePages/AkronSolar.aspx. Accessed September 3, 2025.

which does not use barbed wire. The bottom of the fence could be raised six inches above the ground to not impede the movement of small ground-dwelling animals in the project area. The planned activities would not be expected to have a significant impact on rare species.

Some solar projects have done mass grading of soils prior to pile driving, and if there are heavy precipitation events, this can cause soil erosion and stormwater runoff. The use of best management practices during construction, as well as thorough post-construction restoration, could reduce many of these direct impacts. The site is planned to be seeded with low-growing native and non-native grasses and some areas of more diverse native flowering plants. This would stabilize and improve soils while limiting any runoff onto adjacent properties. The applicant is avoiding impacts to wetlands, waterways, and traditional agricultural land through the proposed placement of the facilities. The project would avoid previously identified archaeological and/or historical resources in the project area.

It is not fully known whether decommissioning a long-term, utility-scale solar project can return a project area to previous conditions. Thorough decommissioning, which would include decompacting soils, would likely allow the land to return to productive commercial forestry use. The applicant anticipates that the negotiation and execution of a joint development agreement with local governments would require the project to provide a decommissioning plan and potential financial assurance that such a plan be completed.

Conclusion

The project as proposed in the application and subsequent filings, including use of the stated construction methods and implementation of the mitigation plans, is not expected to cause any significant environmental effects. There would be increased noise, dust, and vibration, which may affect nearby residents during the construction of project facilities. A change in the landscape from commercial forestry to a more developed area with panels, associated facilities, and fencing would be noticeable to local landowners, wildlife, and visitors, and result in the closure or rerouting of some recreational trails during the project's operational life. There could be increased soil erosion and stormwater runoff from the site, particularly when soils have been disturbed and during heavy precipitation events. Some animals may be displaced from the project area, especially during the construction phase.

No significant impacts on the human environment that would warrant the preparation of an EIS are expected if this project were constructed using some combination of the currently proposed array sites and associated project facilities. Thus, preparation of an EIS, as described in Wis. Stat. § 1.11, is not required for this project.

Copies of the EA are available upon request, either in electronic or paper format (for a paper copy, an address must be provided). Requests for a copy of the EA should be made to Samuel Rumschlag at the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin by telephone at (608) 267-9304, by e-mail at samuel.rumschlag1@wisconsin.gov, or by regular mail directed to the Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 7854, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7854.

Comments

Comments on the preliminary determination for this proposed project should be made to Samuel Rumschlag at the address above, or through the Commission's web comment form. Go to the Commission's website at https://psc.wi.gov , click on "Commission Actions," then click on "File a Public Comment." On the next page, select "File a comment" for case 9832-CE-100.

All comments must be received by Friday, October 24, 2025.

Sincerely,

S J Rumschlag

Samuel Rumschlag
WEPA Coordinator
Division of Digital Access, Consumer and Environmental Affairs

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