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Douglas County's largest solar farm proposal moves ahead

The Fern-Roth solar farm would take up 499 acres along the south side of I-94.



The proposed solar farm south of Alexandria would be larger than others already in Douglas County, such as this one near the Osakis Creamery off Highway 27 south of Osakis. (File photo) Karen Tolkkinen



By Karen Tolkkinen

Today at 6:47 AM

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ALEXANDRIA(<https://www.echopress.com/places/alexandria>) —

A proposal to install a 40-megawatt solar farm south of I-94 near Alexandria is moving forward, with the company's assessment of the environmental impact open for public review.

The Fern-Roth Solar Farm would be by far the largest array in Douglas County, which has previously authorized smaller installations on the county's eastern edge, but it would still represent only a fragment of how the region gets its power. The companies building the installation, SolarGen of Minnesota, LLC and Allied Solar, LLC, would sell the power through Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO).

Coal and natural gas make up 70% of the roughly 70,000 megawatts of energy MISO distributes. Solar makes up about 1% of the total.

So far, Douglas County Land and Resources Manager Dave Rush has heard nothing for or against the project. Solar arrays have become commonplace along the I-94 corridor between Alexandria and St. Cloud.

"Maybe people know now what to expect and they're not offended by it," he said.

The Alexandria area development would occupy 499 acres. It would not touch the 125 acres of wetlands or 10 acres of brush or grassland, according to its environmental assessment. Half of the 20 acres of woods or forest would be removed for the installation and 150 acres would no longer be used to grow crops. It would create 42 additional acres of hard, impervious surface, up from nine. Its equipment would occupy 153 acres.

The company's environmental assessment says that it plans to exist only for 25 years before pulling all of its equipment and restoring

the land to its original condition, but Rush said that time line is more a response to the county's formalities than any real likelihood of the solar farm leaving at that time. The solar panels themselves have a lifespan of 30 years.

County leaders have two concerns about the project, Rush said. One is the removal of farm land from agricultural production and the other is the condition the land will be left in at the end of its expected lifespan. However those concerns can be addressed, he said.

Solar arrays generally don't provoke any controversy, and despite its size, this one seems to be no different than those in other counties, he said.

The public can read the environmental assessment on the [county's website\(https://www.douglascountymn.gov/news/fernroth-40-mw-solar-farm-environmental-assessment-699\)](https://www.douglascountymn.gov/news/fernroth-40-mw-solar-farm-environmental-assessment-699) or at the Land and Resource Management office.

Comments must be submitted by 4:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 27 to David Rush, Douglas County Land & Resource Management, 305 8th Ave. W., Alexandria, MN, 56308 or by email to daveru@co.douglas.mn.us.

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Solar developers eye Alexandria area farmland(<https://www.echopress.com/business/solar-developers-eye-alexandria-area-farmland>)

The land is owned by a farmer, who would lease the acreage to a solar company. It's south of I-94, on Cross Country Lane SW, a dead-end road.

Jul 15, 2022 · *By Karen Tolkkinen(<https://www.echopress.com/karen-tolkkinen>)*

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By **Karen Tolkkinen**(<https://www.echopress.com/karen-tolkkinen>)

Reporter Karen Tolkkinen grew up in Plymouth, Minnesota, graduated from the University of Minnesota with a journalism degree in 1994. Driven by curiosity and a desire to learn about the United States, Karen Tolkkinen has covered local news from Idaho to New Hampshire to Alabama and landing at the Echo Press in Alexandria in 2017.

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Excellent news! It's already too late to prevent a lot of coming disruption from climate change, but every little bit helps! At least here in Minnesota, our weather has stayed closer to normal than much of the rest of the nation, and unlike the coasts, the rising sea levels won't flood these panels.

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