

Powering Progress: Transforming Clean Energy Permitting for a Greener Minnesota

In 2023, Minnesota established one of the nation's most ambitious climate goals, committing to 100% carbon-free electricity by 2040. To achieve this goal, we need wind and solar farms to generate clean energy and transmission lines to carry that energy to the electric grid. Unfortunately, **too many clean energy projects remain bogged down in an inefficient permitting process.** Our "Powering Progress" report shows that without significant reforms to Minnesota's large energy facility permitting process, we could fail to realize our carbon-free ambitions.

WHERE THINGS STAND

- Today, approximately **51% of Minnesota's electricity comes from carbon-free sources**, including wind, solar, hydroelectric, and nuclear.
- To reach the 100% goal, nearly all the remaining growth in electric generation will need to come from zero or low-carbon resources, primarily wind and solar generation.
- For Minnesota to hit its target, **the pace of growth in solar and wind energy generation needs to double**, and the state must identify ways to speed up its transition to carbon-free electricity sources.

REVERSING THIS TREND

- To align the efficiency of Minnesota's clean energy process with the ambition of our clean energy goals, we should make the following changes to the way projects are permitted:
 - **Eliminate redundant steps**, including duplication across responsible agencies.
 - **Increase consistency** by putting more types of clean energy projects through the same process.
 - **Simplify public input opportunities** and ensure citizens know when and how to make their voices heard.

Collectively, these recommendations offer the opportunity to shave several months off of the permitting process. The difference of a couple of months can mean the difference of an entire year, given the seasonality of construction in Minnesota. With the urgency of addressing climate change becoming more apparent, saving this time is more critical now than ever.

PERMITTING ROAD BLOCKS

- Minnesota's clean energy project permitting process is 50 years old, and requires significant upgrades to better align with the challenges we face today.
- The average time from application acceptance to permit issuance is:
 - 250 days for small transmission lines
 - 358 days for wind farms
 - 378 days for solar farms
 - 673 days for larger transmission lines
- **The permitting process is getting slower**, with solar projects started in 2019 taking 249 days longer to receive a permit than solar projects started in 2015.
- The amount of potential clean energy capacity waiting for permits and transmission interconnection is nearly double the amount that Minnesota currently generates.
- **Our neighbors are outpacing us** in clean energy generation growth. Iowa and South Dakota's share of electricity coming from wind and solar sources increased nearly four times more than Minnesota's share between 2017 and 2022.



To view the full report, scan the QR code, or visit northstarpolicy.org.

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