

Pesâkâstêw Solar Project

Open House #1 Summary

Open House Overview

The first public open house for the Pesâkâstêw Solar Project was held on March 6th, 2019. The open house was attended by more than 30 community members. Overall, feedback on the event was positive. Following are the questions asked by the attendees and our responses. These questions and answers have been posted to the project website as well (www.pesakastewsolarproject.ca).

In addition to these questions, we received feedback and suggestions that we will apply to future open houses and to the project itself. All comments will serve to shape our actions and decisions as we move forward.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Will there be a maintenance plan for the project? If so, what will it include?

Yes, there will be a maintenance plan, which will be part of the operations plan.

Generally, equipment maintenance will be driven by the results of regular on-site inspections of the equipment, including solar panels, electrical connections, inverters, and transformers. Based on these inspections, repairs and maintenance will be carried out as needed.

Land inspections will also be part of the maintenance plan, conducted to monitor site drainage, monitor erosion, and assess risk of grass fires. Land repairs and maintenance will be driven by the results of land inspections.

Cleaning the solar panels is not planned at this time, however the first year of operation will assist in determining if cleaning should be considered as part of the regular maintenance. Snow removal is dependent upon final design.

How will the site be revegetated after construction?

There will be a vegetation management plan as part of the operations plan. Vegetation management is expected to evolve over the life of the project. The plan includes planting a ground cover underneath the panels after construction is complete. The ground cover will be selected with a view to minimizing maintenance while considering shading and moisture availability under the panels, weed removal requirements, native species, and short-growing species.

How will the site be reclaimed after the project is decommissioned?

At the end of the project life, the site will be de-energized and all of the equipment will be dismantled and removed. This will include all surface components as well as those subsurface components to a depth of 1 m. Equipment and materials will be recycled as appropriate. The soil and land will be restored to original grade. In consultation with the municipality and landowner, seeding will be carried out growing to prevent topsoil erosion.

March 2019



How much property tax will this project supply for the RM of Weyburn?

At this time, the property tax assessment indicates that the project will pay approximately \$28,000 to \$47,000 per year in property taxes. As property taxes are a function of the cost of specific equipment items and structures, the value of taxes paid will decrease as the value of the project depreciates.

Will the project produce a lot of noise during operation?

Solar projects emit very little noise, with the loudest noise being from the transformers. As the project is located directly adjacent to an existing SaskPower owned substation, the background noise levels will far exceed the noise from the project. As such, the project is not expected to create significant increase to the noise levels.

How big is each solar panel/module?

The average size of solar module used in a utility sized solar project is approximately 1 m x 2 m. Together, several solar modules form a solar array. While this will likely be the size of modules used for this project, the design of the project and the specific equipment have not been finalized or selected.

When will the project start producing electricity?

The project is planned to be commissioned in late 2020, which will mark the beginning for electricity production on the site.

Do solar panels produce glare? How will this impact nearby houses, traffic, and animals?

Solar panels can produce some glare, but no more than what might be produced from a still pond. This project is expected to have negligible, if any, glare impact in the surrounding area.

How does the Environmental Assessment process work?

According to the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Act, 2018, a solar project of this size is required to submit a Technical Proposal (expanded upon below) to the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch (EAB). This is the first step in the Environmental Assessment (EA) process. The Technical Proposal is then screened by the staff at the Department of Environment to determine if the project is deemed to be a *Development* under the definition in the Act. A *Development* is a project deemed to have an effect on unique, rare, or endangered features in the area, use a substantial provincial resource, cause emissions or by-products, cause widespread concern due to potential environmental changes, induce significant environmental change, or have a significant impact on the environment.

If it is determined that the project is not a *Development*, the project can proceed, however it is still required to secure a number of additional applicable permits and approvals under other departments and government levels.

If it is determined that the project is considered a *Development*, the proponent is required to conduct an EA and submit an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This document is reviewed by the Saskatchewan EA Review Panel and the EAB, which, if necessary, provide comments for revisions to the proponent. Once the EIS is deemed adequate, it is released for a 30-day public review period along with the technical review comments. Finally, the EIS, technical review comments, and any public comments are submitted to the Minister who decides whether or not to approve the development. A flow chart of this process can be found at: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/66/89132-EAFlowProcessMap.pdf>

What goes into a Technical Proposal?

The Technical Proposal that must be submitted to the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch requires the following information:

- Project description
- Description of the biological, physical, and human environmental features of the project site
- Potential impact the project might have on the environmental features and associated mitigation measures
- Monitoring programs to minimize impacts during construction and operation
- Conceptual decommissioning and reclamation plans
- Documentation of stakeholder engagement
- Documentation of First Nation and Métis engagement

Who makes the decision of whether the project can proceed or not?

If the project is not deemed a *Development*, the staff at the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch decide if the project requires additional permits.

If the project is deemed a *Development* and be required to submit an EIS, the Minister of Environment makes the final decision at the end of the Environmental Assessment process as to whether the project can proceed or not. The Minister is given all of the technical review comments and the public comments to aid in this decision.

When do the environmental studies occur?

Environmental studies are typically conducted from early Spring through Fall. During the 2018 study season, the following studies were completed:

- Breeding bird surveys
- Fall migratory bird surveys
- Vegetation, wetland, and weed assessments

The field surveys required in the 2019 season include:

- Spring migratory bird surveys (early and mid-Spring)
- Sharp-tailed Grouse Lek surveys (mid to late March and early May)
- Raptor Stick nest survey
- Amphibian auditory survey (early, mid, and late Spring)
- Breeding bird survey to supplement 2018 data
- Short Eared Owl survey
- Common Night Hawk survey

Are there any environmental sensitivities near the proposed site?

Based on the data gathered to date, the environmental sensitivity of the site has been designated as low. Some drainage channels have been observed, but it is believed that this will be advantageous to the project in helping to maintain natural drainage on the site during operation.

Who are the proponents and where are they from?

There are three proponents for this project who, together, form the Pesâkâstêw Solar Limited Partnership. The limited partners are:

- **George Gordon Developments Ltd. (GGDL)**, which is the economic development branch of George Gordon First Nation based in Punnichy, SK. By establishing important business partnerships, GGDL has become a regional First Nation leader in business development. Through these partnerships, GGDL has assembled the capacity and capability to successfully enter high quality bids on major projects related to resource development with renowned North American companies.
- **Red Dog Holdings Ltd. (RDHL)**, which is the economic development branch of Star Blanket Cree Nation based in Fort Qu'Appelle, SK. One of the main goals of RDHL is to develop long term partnerships with companies that have shared values and objectives. RDHL also strives to provide opportunities for sustainable employment, training, wealth creation, and community development.
- **Natural Forces**, which is a private independent power producer based in Halifax, NS that delivers renewable energy projects in partnership with local communities across Canada. Natural Forces develops, constructs, owns, and operates wind, solar, and hydro projects with First Nation communities, universities, municipalities, and local community funds.

How does the partnership between First Nations and the independent power producer work?

The Pesâkâstêw Solar Limited Partnership is a true equity partnership between Natural Forces, and George Gordon Developments Ltd. and Red Dog Holdings Ltd. Each partner contributes their proportionate share of the capital required for this project and once the project is operational, each partner will receive their proportionate share of project income.

How are Atim-Ka Mikosit - ONEC and WSP involved in the project?

Atim-Ka Mikosit - ONEC are acting in their capacity as the project engineers for the design and construction of the project.

WSP have been hired to conduct the environmental baseline surveys on the project site.

Have you considered the use of local sheep for vegetation control in the project area instead of mowing?

Yes, sheep are being considered for vegetation control around the project area. There are several methods of controlling the vegetation being considered. Vegetation control will be part of the vegetation management plan.

Next Steps

Community support is important for a project of this kind. We are thrilled that community members expressed interest and provided valuable feedback at the open house. We hope community involvement continues as the project progresses and as we organize more public consultation sessions. At this time, the next open house is being considered to take place in early summer 2019, which will be advertised on our website and through local media outlets. This second open house will serve to update the community on the status of the project, to answer any questions, and to collect comments and feedback. In the meantime, we will be continuing our environmental studies and working with the RM of Weyburn to satisfy our permitting requirements. We expect to submit the Technical Proposal to the Ministry of Environment during the summer months, once our surveying is completed.