



## Habitat Friendly Solar Certification

Steps for attaining and maintaining certification



**What is Habitat Friendly Solar Certification?** This certification program promotes the planting and management of wildlife habitat with an emphasis on pollinator benefits on solar projects. This effort was initiated from state of Minnesota legislation starting that “an owner of a solar site implementing solar site management practices may claim that the site provides benefits to gamebirds, songbirds and pollinators only if the site adheres to guidance set forth by the pollinator plan provided by the Board of Water and Soil Resources”. Local governments and other landowners can certify their sites as well as solar developers.



Diverse buffer around solar arrays

The following information summarizes steps to becoming certified and maintaining certification.

### Steps to initiating certification:

- 1) For design guidance refer to [Prairie Establishment & Maintenance Technical Guidance for Solar Projects](#) and work with experts in the field of habitat restoration.
- 2) Fill out the Project Planning Assessment Form
- 3) Submit the Project Planning Assessment Form with images of the proposed site and a copy of the planting plan for the project to [dan.shaw@state.mn.us](mailto:dan.shaw@state.mn.us)
- 4) If you meet the requirements listed above you will be added to the list of certified projects that will be posted on the Board of Water and Soil Resources website and enable you to promote the array as MN Board of Water and Soil Resources certified “Habitat Friendly Solar” project.

### Steps to maintaining certification:

- 1) At the end of the third year of vegetation establishment (by December 31<sup>st</sup>) for the project, and after every 3 years have qualified natural resource staff with plant ID knowledge fill out the Established Project [Assessment Form](#) and submit the form along with at least three site images that show the current vegetation to [dan.shaw@state.mn.us](mailto:dan.shaw@state.mn.us). Submitting these materials will keep you on the list of certified projects and enable you to promote the array as MN Board of Water and Soil Resources certified “Habitat Friendly Solar” project.

### Habitat Friendly Solar Certification Q&A:

*Who can fill out the assessment forms and conduct the site assessments?*

Independent contracting ecologists or SWCD staff who have strong plant identification skills can conduct the assessment.

*Is there a charge for being certified?*

There is no charge for going through the assessment process other than if costs related hiring a consultant to do the assessment.

*How many acres can a single form cover?*

One assessment form can be used for most contiguous sites, though more than one form may be needed for sites that have both upland and wetland plant communities that are significantly different in their composition, or sites that occur at multiple locations, and each site is greater than 20 acres including perimeter acreage.

*For the "Project Planning Assessment Form" where can I find more information about determining if the genetic origin of seed is within 175 miles?* Starting on page 7 of [BWSR's Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines](#) there is more information on this topic as well as other topics related to seed quality and vegetation establishment.

*What areas can be excluded from assessment areas?* Certain areas do not need to be included as part of the habitat assessments, these include roads, parking areas and buildings. Some sites have wetland areas that are dominated with aggressive invasive species including reed canary grass or hybrid/narrow-leaf cattail that is too difficult to convert to native vegetation. As long as these areas are mapped as separate from the planted areas they can be left out of the assessment.

*What monitoring methods should be used for site assessments?*

Qualified natural resource staff who are conducting the assessments should select a monitoring method that will provide an unbiased assessment of the site that will be representative of the entire site rather than select portions of the site.

*What if it is determined that a site no longer meets standards?*

If sites no longer meet standards it is recommended to work with contractors to assess what changes are needed to make the necessary improvements and improve scores.