

## Hawthorn Solar, LLC

### Detailed Project Description

In 2019, New York State reaffirmed its commitment to renewables by passing the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which requires New York State to generate 70% of its electricity needs from renewable energy sources by the year 2030. As part of that initiative, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) initiated and expanded incentive programs to encourage renewable energy development. One such program is the annual competitive procurement process for renewable energy credits (RECs) generated by Large Scale Renewable electric generating facilities. The Hawthorn Solar project was bid into this competitive procurement process in late 2020 and received a contract award in early 2021.

The Hawthorn Solar project is a 20-Megawatt (MW) AC solar electric generating facility proposed in the Town of Hoosick, Rensselaer County, New York. This project will be located on land along Pine Valley and Fords Road. The project will be interconnecting directly to a 115 kV electrical transmission line that is adjacent to the western border of the project site. The 115 kV transmission line is owned and operated by National Grid. Hawthorn Solar will sell electricity directly into the wholesale market via the transmission system.

The project is being designed specifically to avoid any significant adverse impacts to the environment. The project is being designed to avoid all impacts to state regulated freshwater wetlands and threatened and endangered species, will mitigate public viewshed concerns via tree screening, and will minimize soil disturbance. Additionally, the project will not produce any negative impacts on erosion or stormwater runoff.

Importantly, the project will not permanently change the existing conditions or use of the site. At the end of the project life, the solar system will be completely removed, and the sites agricultural land will be restored to its current condition, effectively preserving its agricultural heritage in ways that other potential development (like a residential subdivision or other commercial development) would not. As a condition of the project's award from NYSERDA, the project must abide by enhanced guidelines for solar project construction published in the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets in 2019. The project will follow or exceed these guidelines for the construction, operation, and decommissioning of the project to ensure that the land can be returned to agricultural use at the end of the project's useful life.

The proposed project will consist of galvanized steel posts, driven or screwed into the ground, galvanized steel racking, solar photovoltaic modules, inverters, transformers, gravel access roads, concrete equipment pads, and appurtenant equipment, conductors, and security fencing. The project also involves minimal tree clearing to allow for existing vegetation to limit potential viewshed impacts on the general public or project neighbors. Additional landscaping measures will be employed to minimize any remaining viewshed impacts.

## Project Design Considerations

The project area has been assessed using the NYS DEC's EAF Mapper. According to the EAF Mapper, the project is outside the vicinity of any state identified Significant Natural Communities and will have no impact on threatened or endangered species of animals or plants. See **Exhibit 1** for further information on the project's impacts to rare and endangered species, and significant natural communities.

The project is located entirely within Rensselaer County Consolidated Agricultural District #3 (RENS003). The project is being designed specifically to encourage the long-term feasibility of the underlying agricultural resource. The project site will be restored to its current agricultural state at the end of the project life, effectively preserving the sites agricultural heritage for the long-term. See **Exhibit 2** for further clarification on the project's impacts to agriculture and prime soils.

The project layout is optimized to minimize impacts to wetland areas. The project area was surveyed by wetland scientists in the Spring and Fall of 2022. The site design has been developed to utilize timber bridges such that the construction of solar arrays and access roads avoid all impacts on wetland areas. Additionally, the site design has been developed so that electrical crossings will have no impacts to wetland areas. The wetland delineation report was received in January of 2023. A Letter of No Jurisdiction regarding species from the DEC, received in November of 2022, is included in **Exhibit 1** to this submission which addresses.

For an abundance of caution, tree cutting of all trees that are 4 inches in diameter or greater at breast height (DBH) shall be restricted to October 31<sup>st</sup> through March 31<sup>st</sup> to limit potential impacts of any threatened or endangered bat species.

## Project Construction

Limited grading will be taking place on site, and site work should be limited to the removal of tree stumps, installing gravel access roads, trenching for electric conduit/conductors, installing equipment pads, and installing swales, ponds, and other stormwater controls as determined necessary in our final construction design and our Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). See **Exhibit 2**.

Project construction is expected to be completed in a period of less than one year and will take, at most, 18 months. Most activity should be completed during a three to four-month period of that year. All activities involving soil disturbance will be adhere to NYSDAM requirements. Plans to mitigate dust, traffic and other temporary construction impacts will be employed by the project.

During construction, the community will reap benefits from the project similar to any large-scale construction project. The project will create local construction jobs as well as provide opportunities for local contractors to participate in the project by bidding on certain portions of

the project scope that will be subcontracted. Additionally, the local economy, including hospitality businesses, will benefit from the employees of the contractors building the project that will be living or staying temporarily in the area while the project is under construction.

### **Project Operation**

Once constructed, the project's anticipated lifetime is 25-40 years based on the continued efficiency of the solar equipment. Following the project's useful lifetime, the project will be decommissioned and removed from the land in accordance with an approved decommissioning plan, NYSDAM guidelines, and any relevant laws.

During operation, the community will benefit financially from real estate tax payments that the project will be paying to the local taxing jurisdictions, including the town, county, and school district. The project will employ one full-time employee based in the region to support the ongoing operation of the facility. Local landscaping contractors will be employed to manage vegetation on the property and to maintain grasses growing beneath the solar panels as warranted.

Solar equipment maintenance is expected to be limited and will require periodic inspections, predominantly at equipment pads and at the project substation.