

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

**IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF WILD SPRINGS SOLAR, LLC FOR AN
ENERGY FACILITY PERMIT FOR THE WILD SPRINGS SOLAR PROJECT**

SD PUC DOCKET EL 20-____

**DIRECT TESTIMONY OF JAY HESSE
ON BEHALF OF WILD SPRINGS SOLAR, LLC**

May 15, 2020

1 **I. INTRODUCTION AND QUALIFICATIONS**

2

3 **Q. Please state your name, employer, and business address.**

4 A. My name is Jay Hesse. I am a Senior Developer, Market Lead at Geronimo
5 Energy, LLC (“Geronimo”). I am based in Geronimo’s Fargo office, which is
6 located at 3003 32nd Avenue South, Suite 200B, Fargo, ND 58103.

7

8 **Q. Briefly describe your educational and professional background and duties.**

9 A. I have a Bachelor of Science in Business Computer Information Systems from
10 St. Cloud University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. I started with Geronimo in 2010
11 working on renewable project development in South Dakota and North Dakota. I
12 currently manage Geronimo’s North Dakota office and oversee Geronimo’s
13 development of renewable energy projects in a region that includes South Dakota.
14 A copy of my curriculum vitae is provided as Exhibit A2-1.

15

16 **Q. Could you explain the relationship between Geronimo and Wild Springs
17 Solar, LLC (“Wild Springs”) with respect to the proposed Wild Springs Solar
18 Project (“Project”)?**

19 A. Wild Springs is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Geronimo, a National Grid Company,
20 and Geronimo is assisting Wild Springs in all aspects of Project development.

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22 **Q. Could you please describe Geronimo’s experience in the renewable energy
23 industry?**

24 A. Geronimo is a utility-scale renewable energy development company
25 headquartered in Bloomington, Minnesota that has developed multiple operating
26 wind farms and solar projects throughout the United States. Over 2,400
27 megawatts (“MW”) of wind and solar projects developed by Geronimo are either
28 under construction or operational, including 97 utility-scale and community solar
29 projects completed. Geronimo also has a multi-gigawatt development pipeline of
30 wind and solar projects in various stages of development throughout the United
31 States.

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Geronimo provides custom renewable energy development solutions for utilities, independent power purchasers, and corporations looking to harness renewable energy for business growth. Geronimo’s founder has an agricultural background, and the first Geronimo project is sited solely on his land. Geronimo prides itself on developing wind farms and solar facilities that are farmer-friendly, community-driven, and beneficial for rural communities.

Q. What is your role with respect to the Project?

A. I am the Project Manager.

II. PURPOSE OF TESTIMONY

Q. What is the purpose of your Direct Testimony?

A. The purpose of my testimony is to provide an overview of the Project’s development history, landowner and community coordination, and socioeconomic benefits.

Q. What exhibits are attached to your Direct Testimony?

A. The following exhibit is attached to my Direct Testimony:

- Exhibit A2-1: Curriculum Vitae

Q. Please identify the sections of the Energy Facility Permit Application (“Application”) that you are sponsoring.

A. I am sponsoring the following portions of the Application:

- Section 1.0: Introduction (except for Section 1.4)
- Section 2.0: Purpose of, and Demand for, the Energy Facility
- Section 3.0: Estimated Cost of the Energy Facility
- Section 4.1: Overall Project Description
- Section 6.0: Time Schedule
- Section 7.1: Selection of the Land Control Area

- 63 • Section 9.5.4: Visual Resources (landowner coordination)
- 64 • Section 9.7.1: Socioeconomics
- 65 • Section 10.0: Future Additions and Modifications
- 66 • Section 11.3: Local Community Input
- 67 • Section 11.4: Applicant's Burden of Proof
- 68 • Section 12.0: Testimony and Exhibits
- 69 • Appendix A: Agency Correspondence

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71 **III. PROJECT OVERVIEW**

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73 **Q. Who will own and operate the Project?**

74 A. The Project will be owned and operated by Wild Springs Solar, LLC.

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76 **Q. Please provide a basic description of the Project, including where it is**
77 **located.**

78 A. The proposed Project is an up to 128 MW solar energy facility located south and
79 southwest of New Underwood in Pennington County, South Dakota. The Project
80 would include:

- 81 • Solar modules, inverters, and tracking racking;
- 82 • Aboveground and/or belowground electrical collector and communication
83 systems;
- 84 • Project substation;
- 85 • Operations and maintenance ("O&M") building and parking lot;
- 86 • Access roads;
- 87 • Up to three weather stations;
- 88 • Fencing; and
- 89 • Temporary laydown/staging areas.

90

91 **Q. Has Wild Springs secured all of the necessary property rights for the**
92 **Project?**

93 A. Yes, Wild Springs has obtained the necessary lease agreements from landowners
94 for the Project.

95

96 **Q. How and where will the Project interconnect to the electric grid?**

97 A. The Project will interconnect to the existing New Underwood Substation, which is
98 owned and operated by the Western Area Power Administration (“WAPA”) and is
99 within the Southwest Power Pool (“SPP”) system. A less than one-mile-long 115
100 kilovolt (“kV”) transmission line will extend between the Project’s substation and
101 WAPA’s New Underwood Substation to facilitate the interconnection.

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103 **Q. Has the Project identified an off-taker for the energy it will produce?**

104 A. Yes, Wild Springs has entered into a Power Purchase Agreement (“PPA”) with
105 Basin Electric Power Cooperative for the Project’s output.

106

107 **Q. What is the proposed development schedule for the Project?**

108 A. Per the PPA, Wild Springs must deliver the Project’s output beginning in 2022. To
109 meet this schedule, Wild Springs anticipates beginning Project construction as
110 early as the Second Quarter 2021 and completing Project construction in time for
111 the Project to be operational by the end of 2022.

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113 **IV. SITE SELECTION AND LANDOWNER/LOCAL COORDINATION**

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115 **Q. What factors led Wild Springs to identify the proposed site in Pennington**
116 **County for development of the Project?**

117 A. Key initial factors in selecting the proposed Project site were a supportive local
118 community, an exceptional solar resource, and an adjacent existing substation with
119 capacity to facilitate grid interconnection. Additionally, the site has minimal
120 environmental constraints, adequate public road access, and a relatively flat,
121 unobstructed terrain, all of which are important to development of a utility-scale
122 solar project.

123

124 **Q. Discuss Wild Springs' coordination with landowners regarding the Project.**

125 A. Wild Springs initially contacted landowners within approximately five miles of the
126 New Underwood Substation to gauge their interest in hosting a solar project. The
127 goal was to determine whether there was enough interest from relatively
128 contiguous landowners in an area near the existing substation to move forward
129 with development. Wild Springs began executing lease agreements with
130 interested landowners in 2016. Ultimately, Wild Springs entered into solar
131 development agreements with three sets of contiguous landowners, including
132 landowners adjacent to the New Underwood Substation. Throughout Project
133 development, Wild Springs has coordinated with Project landowners on their
134 agreements and planned survey work, and gathered information from landowners
135 regarding their existing land use.

136

137 **Q. Did Wild Springs seek input from the community regarding the Project?**

138 A. Yes. On February 4, 2020, Wild Springs hosted an informational meeting for
139 Project participants, landowners adjacent to the Project boundary, and local
140 government officials in New Underwood to provide updates regarding the Project
141 and address any questions or concerns.

142

143 **Q. Were any concerns raised by the community regarding the Project?**

144 A. The owners of a residence on land adjacent to the Project raised aesthetic
145 concerns regarding the proximity of the Project to their home. To address their
146 concerns, Wild Springs has committed to installing vegetation in some areas to
147 provide screening between the residence and the solar facilities. Wild Springs will
148 continue to coordinate with the landowners to develop a plan for installing the
149 vegetative screening.

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151 In addition, Wild Springs has answered typical questions regarding utility-scale
152 solar projects on topics including the cost of power, decommissioning,
153 construction, vegetation management, job opportunities, economic impacts, and
154 Project operations. The local community has been very supportive of the Project.

155 For example, Rushmore Electric Cooperative sent us a letter of support, noting
156 that the Project will be a source of local power and voltage for its system and will
157 provide economic benefits to the State and local community. See *also* Application,
158 Section 2.0 and Appendix A (October 8, 2019 Simmons Letter).

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160 **V. PROJECT BENEFITS**

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162 **Q. With respect to benefits, could you please describe the local and state**
163 **benefits the Project will provide?**

164 A. In addition to providing a local renewable power source, the Project will also
165 provide a number of economic benefits. Long-term, the Project will provide
166 participating landowners with additional income and will create four full-time
167 operations and maintenance personnel jobs. The Project will also increase the
168 long-term state and local tax base, which will benefit the State and local economy.
169 Specifically, the Project will pay capacity and production taxes that will benefit the
170 State of South Dakota, the New Underwood School District, and Pennington
171 County. Additionally, Wild Springs will establish the Wild Springs Education Fund,
172 which will benefit the New Underwood School District through annual contributions
173 for the first 20 years of Project operations. Over 20 years of operation, direct
174 economic benefits are estimated to be:

- 175 • Capacity and Production Tax: ~\$12 million over 20 years
- 176 • Education Fund: \$500,000 over 20 years (\$25,000 per year, at \$200 per
177 installed MW)
- 178 • Full-Time Jobs: ~4 full time jobs totaling up to \$5.6 million over 20 years

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180 During construction, the Project will provide additional economic benefits. As
181 discussed in the Direct Testimony of Chip LaCasse, construction of the Project is
182 anticipated to generate over 150 jobs during peak construction, which would
183 equate to approximately \$25 million in wages and employee benefits. General
184 skilled labor is expected to be available locally or in the State, and local

185 expenditures will be made for equipment, fuel, operating supplies, and other
186 products and services, which will benefit area businesses.

187
188 Overall, the Project will provide significant economic benefits to local landowners,
189 Pennington County, and the State of South Dakota.

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191 **VI. CONCLUSION**

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193 **Q. Does this conclude your Direct Testimony?**

194 A. Yes.

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196 Dated this 15th day of May, 2020.

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198 _____

199 Jay Hesse

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