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APPALACHIAN MTN CLUB



MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance



Solar Siting Joint Statement

October 1, 2021

Rapid, Responsible Deployment:

Integrating and Aligning Climate Mitigation, Resiliency, Biodiversity, and Equity

Goals:

The undersigned organizations call on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to plan and implement policies and programs for the rapid, responsible siting of solar power systems with the following overarching goals:

1. Maximize deployment of solar power within the more than 1 million acres of land that are already developed or degraded, including rooftops, parking lots, and other low-impact areas with minimal ecosystem service values;
2. If further analysis shows that additional capacity is needed outside those areas, determine which natural or working lands and waters are most and least appropriate for solar energy using spatial analysis and stakeholder input; and
3. Avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts to natural and working lands¹ and waters and the valuable benefits they provide including biodiversity and climate resilience.

¹ "Natural and working lands"- lands within the commonwealth that: (i) are actively used by an agricultural owner or operator for an agricultural operation that includes, but is not limited to, active engagement in farming or ranching; (ii) produce forest products; (iii) consist of forests, grasslands, freshwater and riparian systems, wetlands, coastal and estuarine areas, watersheds, wildlands or wildlife habitats; or (iv) are used for recreational purposes, including parks, urban and community forests, trails or other similar open space land.

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2021/Chapter8>

Guiding Principles:

These goals are based on the following guiding principles for deployment of solar energy systems in Massachusetts. We urge the state to align its applicable plans, programs and policies accordingly.

1. We support the Commonwealth's goal of achieving Net Zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050, including the new interim goals for emissions reductions,
2. Energy conservation and efficiency must remain top priorities.
3. State policies, programs and funding for the rapid, responsible deployment of solar power generation systems are essential components of the Commonwealth's transitioning away from fossil fuels towards the decarbonization of our electricity generation and energy supply systems.
4. We support the Commonwealth's integrated climate mitigation and adaptation policies -- with an emphasis on nature-based solutions; environmental justice; and protecting, managing, and restoring our natural resources.
5. Natural and working lands and waters provide many important and valuable ecosystem services, including but not limited to, carbon sequestration and storage, flood prevention, air and water quality protection, habitat for native plants and animals, production of food and wood products, outdoor recreation, physical and mental health, and overall quality of life. The importance of protecting, managing and restoring natural systems' capacity to provide these services is increasingly important in light of the impacts of climate change, including more intense storms, floods, droughts and excessive heat.
6. The crises of climate, environmental justice, and biodiversity must be addressed together, as they are intertwined.² Climate mitigation efforts including renewable energy development must be undertaken in a manner that does not exacerbate the biodiversity crisis or environmental injustices.
7. The state must carefully align energy, climate, equity, and natural resources programs and policies for a consistent and predictable path forward to achieve mutually beneficial goals. The lack of reconciliation and alignment of goals for protecting, managing and restoring natural resources with programs supporting solar buildout is resulting in increased environmental impacts and social conflicts that delay renewable energy projects, drive up costs, and slow the clean energy transition. This unfortunate cycle of conflict has been a hallmark of development of renewable energy in Massachusetts and elsewhere. The world cannot afford to repeat a cycle of conflict in the expansion of clean energy and expect to meet climate goals.
8. Achieving this alignment requires a process with careful and transparent consideration of all stakeholder interests, including the solar industry, landowners, municipalities, indigenous people, farmers, foresters, nonprofit conservation organizations, environmental justice communities, businesses, the public, and future generations.

Supporting Organizations and contacts:

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² Pörtner, H.O., et al. 2021. Scientific outcome of the IPBES-IPCC co-sponsored workshop on biodiversity and climate change; IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany, DOI:10.5281/zenodo.4659158.

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