

**STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Petition of Savage Solar Energy LLC for a	)	
Certificate of Public Good, pursuant to 30	)	
V.S.A. § 248, authorizing the installation	)	
and operation of a 2.75 MW solar electric	)	Case No. 26-____-PET
generation facility off Route 103 in Chester,	)	
Vermont to be known as the “Savage Solar	)	
Energy Project”	)	

PREFILED TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL LEW-SMITH

March 23, 2026

Summary: Mr. Lew-Smith’s testimony addresses the Savage Solar Energy Project’s compliance with certain Section 248(b)(5) criteria related to natural resources.

Exhibits

SSE-MLS-1: Resume

SSE-MLS-2: Natural Resources Assessment

1 **Q1. Please state your name, occupation, and business address.**

2 A1. My name is Michael Lew-Smith, and I am an ecologist and botanist and specialize in
3 conducting wetland delineations, and surveys for RTE plants and significant natural
4 communities. I am an owner and one of the managing partners of Arrowwood
5 Environmental (“AE” or “Arrowwood”), a firm that provides environmental services,
6 including ecological assessments and natural resource mapping. Our primary office is
7 located at 950 Bert White Road, Huntington, Vermont, 05462.

8
9 **Q2. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

10 A2. My testimony supports the petition of Savage Solar Energy LLC (“SSE” or “Petitioner”)
11 for approval to construct and operate a 2.75 megawatt (“MW”) solar electric generation
12 facility, to be known as the Savage Solar Project (“Project”), in Chester, Vermont. I
13 testify on its compliance with certain Section 248(b)(5) criteria related to natural
14 resources.

15
16 **Q3. Please describe your professional background, qualifications, and experience.**

17 A3. I received a Bachelor’s Degree in Natural Resource Management from the University of
18 Michigan and a Master’s Degree in Plant Biology from the University of Minnesota. I
19 am one of AE’s founding partners. Over the past 20 years, I have conducted numerous
20 environmental assessments for proposed developments and also worked with many towns
21 in mapping and assessing natural communities. See my resume, ***Exhibit SSE-MLS-1.***

22

1 **Q4. Have you previously testified before the Public Utility Commission?**

2 A4. Yes. I have provided prefiled testimony and/or exhibits on behalf of a number of
3 projects, including recent projects such Barnet Solar, Case No. 23-3381-PET; Furnace
4 Brook Solar, Case No. 23-4028-PET; Post Road Solar, Case No. 23-4324-PET; Little
5 Brook Solar, Case No. 23-4324-PET; and Stone House Solar, Case No. 25-1827-PET.

7 **Q5. What work have you conducted with respect to the Project?**

8 A5. Under my direction in whole or part, Arrowwood has prepared a technical memorandum
9 which I rely on when making my assessments under the Section 248(b)(5) natural
10 resources criteria described in further detail below. See *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*.

11 In making my assessments, support staff at Arrowwood and I have relied upon the
12 Project site plans developed by Krebs & Lansing Consulting Engineers, Inc. (“K&L”)
13 (*Exhibit SSE-TH-2*) as well as information provided by SSE. My understanding of the
14 Project comes from design planning coordination with K&L’s engineer as well as SSE
15 and its agents. Project support staff and I have provided recommendations to the site
16 plans, which have incorporated several suggestions to avoid/minimize natural resource
17 impacts as well as incorporate best management practices/details. The results of
18 Arrowwood’s specific assessments are included in detail in the above-referenced
19 memorandum, and generally summarized below.

1 **Q6. What areas did you review for natural resources related to your evaluation of the**
2 **Project?**

3 A6. AE reviewed the full Project parcel, as shown in Figure 1 of the natural resources
4 memorandum in *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*. In addition to this study area, AE reviewed the
5 area where the proposed access road and interconnection route will be located between
6 Route 103 and the Project area, which is included in my analysis of potential impacts to
7 natural resources a result of the Project.

8
9 **SECTION 248 CRITERIA**

10 **Q7. Which Section 248 criteria does your testimony address?**

11 A7. My testimony addresses in whole, or pertinent parts of, 30 V.S.A. § 248(b)(5) with
12 respect to natural resources and environmental criteria including the following Act 250
13 criteria incorporated by reference: 10 V.S.A. §§ 6086 (a)(1)(A) (Headwaters), (a)(1)(E)
14 (Streams), (a)(1)(F) (Shorelines), (a)(1)(G) (Wetlands), (a)(8) (Rare and Irreplaceable
15 Natural Areas), (a)(8)(A) (Rare Threatened and Endangered Species and Necessary
16 Wildlife Habitat); 10 V.S.A. §1424a(d) (Outstanding Resource Waters), and section
17 248(b)(5)(Use of Natural Resources).

18
19 **Headwaters – 10 V.S.A. § 6086 (a)(1)(A)**

20 **Q8. Is the Project located in a headwater and, if so, will it reduce the quality of ground**
21 **or surface water?**

22 A8. No, the Project is not located in a headwater. Regardless, the Project will meet all
23 applicable health and environmental water quality regulations and will not result in a

1 reduction in quality of ground or surface waters in the area. For these reasons, the Project
2 will have no adverse impact on headwater areas. See further details in my report, *Exhibit*
3 *SSE-MLS-2*.

4
5 **Streams – 10 V.S.A. § 6086 (a)(1)(E)**

6 **Q9. Is the Project on or adjacent to the bank of a stream?**

7 A9. Yes. There are two streams near the Project. As discussed in *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*, a
8 tributary to the Williams River is located approximately 50 feet west of the Project area,
9 and the Williams River is located approximately 125 feet east of the Project area. The
10 Project has been designed to avoid impacts to these streams and their associated riparian
11 buffer zones. The Project will not result in any clearing of forest vegetation within the
12 riparian buffer zones (measured as 50 feet from top of bank/top of slope of streams and
13 edge of wetland; 100 feet from top of bank/top of slope of the Williams River). Based
14 upon the above and further details in my report, *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*, the Project will not
15 have an undue adverse impact on streams.

16
17 **Shorelines – 10 V.S.A. § 6086 (a)(1)(F)**

18 **Q10. Is the Project located on a shoreline?**

19 A10. No. The site of the proposed Project is not located on a shoreline. The closest shoreline
20 to the Project is that of the Williams River, located approximately 125 feet to the east of
21 the Project area. The Project will not result in any vegetative clearing along the shoreline
22 of the Williams River and will retain the shoreline in its existing condition. Thus, the
23 Project will not result in undue adverse impacts to shorelines. *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*.

Wetlands – 10 V.S.A. § 6086 (a)(1)(G)

Q11. Is the Project located in or adjacent to a wetland or wetland buffer? If so, will the Project comply with the rules of the Agency of Natural Resources (“ANR” or “Agency”) regarding significant (Class 1 or 2) wetlands?

A11. Yes. There is a Class II wetland located west of the Project area, as shown in the natural resources map in *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*. The Project has been sited to avoid direct impacts to the Class II wetland. However, the new Project gravel access road will result in approximately 1,224 square feet of impacts to the Class II wetland buffer at its northern extent. The overhead power will be run along this new road and will involve limited vegetative management, portions of which will occur within the wetland buffer area. Petitioner will file a Vermont Wetland Permit application for the Project and expects a permit to be issued in support of Criterion (G). The wetland buffer crossing has been designed to avoid direct wetland impacts, minimize wetland buffer impacts to the extent practical, and to avoid adverse impacts to wetland functions and values. Additionally, Petitioner has agreed to conduct a comprehensive planting restoration within approximately 26,296 square feet of wetland and riparian buffer areas along the southwestern edge of the parcel that were previously impacted unrelated to the Project, and is working closely with ANR personnel on this restoration plan. This plan will be incorporated into the Vermont Wetland Permit application and subsequent permit. With these measures, the Project will result in no undue adverse impacts to wetland resources. In addition, due to the planned restoration along the tributary, the amount of naturally

1 vegetated wetland buffer will increase, thereby increasing wetland functioning in this
2 area. See Site Plan, *Exhibit SSE-TH-2*, and *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2* for further discussion.

3
4 **Rare and Irreplaceable Natural Areas – 10 V.S.A. § 6086 (a)(8)**

5 **Q12. Is the Project located in or adjacent to any rare and irreplaceable natural areas, or**
6 **will it have any undue adverse impacts on any such areas?**

7 A12. No. As described in *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*, there are no significant natural communities
8 that would be considered Rare and Irreplaceable Natural Areas within the Project area
9 and thus, there will be no adverse impacts on Rare and Irreplaceable Natural Areas.

10
11 **Endangered Species and**
12 **Necessary Wildlife Habitat – 10 V.S.A. § 6086 (a)(8)(A)**

13 **Q13. Will the Project impact any necessary wildlife habitat?**

14 A13. No. As discussed in greater detail in *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*, the Project site is
15 characterized as an active agricultural corn field and does not meet the criteria for
16 necessary wildlife habitat. There is mapped white-tailed deer wintering area located
17 approximately 450 feet west of the Project area, but AE confirmed the absence of historic
18 or recent deer wintering activity within the Project area. There is no black bear habitat, no
19 grassland bird habitat, and no vernal pools within the Project area. Therefore, the Project
20 will have no adverse impact on necessary wildlife habitat.

1 **Q14. Is the Project located in or adjacent to habitat of any rare, threatened, or**
2 **endangered (“RTE”) species? If so, will the Project destroy or significantly imperil**
3 **any endangered species?**

4 A14. Due to the nature of the site as an active corn field, a rare plant inventory was deemed
5 unnecessary for this area by ANR (Everett Marshall, personal communication
6 9/18/2023). I conducted a rare plant survey for the area of the proposed access road,
7 which is naturally vegetated, on October 5, 2023. No uncommon or RTE plant species
8 were documented during that survey. With respect to RTE animal species, the Project is
9 located in the town of Chester, which ANR has determined is within the predicted
10 summer ranges for both Northern Long-Eared Bat and Tricolored Bat. However, the
11 Project site is almost entirely agricultural corn field and involves only approximately 0.06
12 acres of vegetative clearing and management, which is less than the threshold applied by
13 the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (“VFWD”) of 1% of the total forested area
14 within a 1 square mile radius of the Project to trigger further conservation measures. The
15 Project will therefore have no undue adverse impact on RTE plant or animal species. See
16 *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2* for additional details supporting these conclusions.

17
18 **Outstanding Resource Waters – 10 V.S.A. § 1424a(d)**

19 **Q15. Is the Project located on or would it affect any segment of any outstanding resource**
20 **waters designated by the former Water Resources Board, former Water Resources**
21 **Panel, or ANR?**

1 A15. No. As described in *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*, no outstanding resource waters will intersect
2 the Project and as such the Project will not affect any segment of any outstanding
3 resource waters.

4
5 **Use of Natural Resources – 30 V.S.A. § 248(b)(5)**

6 **Q16. Will the Project have an undue adverse impact with respect to the use of natural**
7 **resources?**

8 A16. No, it will not. As described in *Exhibit SSE-MLS-2*, and my testimony above, the
9 Project will not have an undue adverse impact on headwaters, floodways, streams,
10 shorelines, wetlands, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, rare threatened and endangered
11 species and necessary wildlife habitat, or outstanding resource waters.

12
13 **Q17. Does that conclude your testimony at this time?**

14 A17. Yes.