

NASF RESOLUTION NO. 2024-02: Study on Deforestation from Utility-scale Solar Siting (*Interim Position*)

ORIGIN OF RESOLUTION: NASF Forest Resource Management Committee

ISSUE OF CONCERN:

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) firmly believes that forests, forest products, and renewable energy production play critical roles in addressing the threats posed by climate change. As demand for utility-scale solar energy rapidly increases, there is growing concern around deforestation occurring to site newly constructed facilities. Due to their large footprint, clearing forests for new solar facilities can lead to a loss of ecosystem services provided by forests at a local and regional scale. Such ecosystem services can include clean air and water, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, generation of forest products, aesthetics, and recreation.

Instances of deforestation from the construction and operation of utility-scale solar energy facilities have occurred across much of the nation. It is the position of NASF that this issue requires thoughtful study to inform consideration by federal, state, and local policymakers. We recognize the siting of renewable energy generating facilities is a complex issue that requires appropriately acknowledging and balancing state and federal-level energy policy priorities, local zoning authority, and landowner private property rights. NASF recommends robust research be conducted on the scope and extent of deforestation that has already occurred from the siting of solar energy facilities as well as that which could foreseeably occur using an interdisciplinary modeling approach.

BACKGROUND:

Over the past decade, state and national policies to increase the amount of energy generated by renewable sources has driven demand sharply upward for new solar generating facilities. Since 2014, solar generation has increased sevenfold, a trend driven by utility-scale projects.¹ Recent forecasts also expect solar power generation to grow a further 75 percent over the next two years and account for almost all growth in U.S. power generation.² Across much of the United States, the siting of large acreage facilities has resulted in instances of deforestation and the associated loss of critical ecosystem services. To date, there has been no robust, nation-wide study to understand the full scope of forest conversion that has already occurred from solar energy facility siting and – as the renewable energy sector continues to respond to unprecedented levels of state and federal-level support – an understanding of the range of possible futures.

RESOLUTION:

As the nation responds to mitigate the threats posed by climate change, we must ensure we are on a thoughtful path forward that appropriately takes into account the social, economic, and environmental value of our forests. The National Association of State Foresters recommends the United States Department of Agriculture, led by the United States Forest Service, in partnership with other relevant federal departments and agencies study and issue a report on the current and projected loss of forested lands from the siting and construction of utility-scale solar energy facilities.

NASF action:

(X) approved

Date of Action: September 24, 2024

¹ Solar Energy Industries Association and Wood Mackenzie “[Solar Market Insight Report Q2 2024](#)”

² U.S. Energy Information Administration, “[Short-Term Energy Outlook, January 2024](#)”