



Angela Anderson
Marketing Director
218.894.6017
aanderson@regionfive.org

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Major School Solar Project Slated for Completion with Six Solar Arrays Totaling 1.5 MW

STAPLES, MN – New Energy Equity, Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) and Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL) have successfully partnered to develop six solar arrays, totaling 1.5 MW, for Pine River-Backus and Pequot Lakes school districts and Central Lakes College. These three projects in central Minnesota will reduce each school's carbon footprint by 1,420 metric tons of CO₂, while providing discounted and predictable electricity costs over the next 25 years.

\$2MM in funding was secured by R5DC through a Renewable Development Fund grant made available by Xcel Energy. "This is an excellent example of a public-private partnership that makes a real difference to local institutions," said Cheryl Hills, R5DC's Executive Director and the Project Lead. "This project helps Xcel Energy to reduce the carbon footprint of its operations and bring Minnesota closer to its renewable energy goals, the schools save money and offer new STEAM educational opportunities and R5DC assists in meeting the region's economic development goals."

Construction of the largest site, Pine River Backus, began in October 2018 and was completed in December 2018. This 800kW solar array will offset more than 80% of the entire district's electricity load. The second array located at Pequot Lakes is currently under construction. This 354 kW rooftop installation required significant roof upgrades and despite extraordinary weather conditions including sub-zero temperatures impacting RREAL's construction crew, is slated for on-time completion in early Spring. The remaining four ground-mount systems totaling 333 kW will be built on multiple Central Lakes College campuses by May 2019.

This multi-year project has come to fruition as a result of dedicated school superintendents and a resourceful and committed project team. "We are happy to be part of this project. Saving money while helping to get more renewable energy built for Minnesota is great for us and our students," said Dave Endicott, Superintendent for Pine River-Backus Schools. "We are very grateful for the work that R5DC, RREAL and the rest of the project team put into making this happen."

Beyond reducing each school's CO₂ emissions, these solar arrays will become a learning tool for each educational institution. As part of the project, curriculum is developed and provided to the schools, so students will understand the environmental and economic impacts of their school's investment in solar.

Chris Lindholm, Superintendent for Pequot Lakes Schools said, "We plan to bring students out to the array, to watch its performance from web-based tracking services and other activities to bring this project to life for our students."

Matthew Hankey, President of New Energy Equity said that this is one of the most rewarding aspects of doing projects for schools. "Close to half of our projects at New Energy Equity have been with schools throughout Minnesota and the rest of the country. There is great curriculum readily available now for

students of all ages, from elementary school to college.” He added, “This is their project in many ways. They should definitely be encouraged to learn about it.”

A ribbon-cutting ceremony and presentations to celebrate this achievement are scheduled for Thursday, September 26, 2019 at Pine River-Backus High School from 2:00 – 4:30 p.m. The public is cordially invited to attend.

Project partners: Xcel Energy Renewable Development Fund, Minnesota Public Utilities, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, Region Five Development Commission, Rural Renewable Energy Alliance, REAL Solar Design-Build, Sourcewell, New Energy Equity LLC, Minnesota Power, Brainerd Public Utilities, Todd-Wadena Electric Cooperative, Widseth Smith Nolting, Kandiyo Consulting, and numerous valued local contractors.

Project school sites: Pine River-Backus and Pequot Lakes School Districts, Central Lakes College at Brainerd & Staples campus.

Pictured in photo: REAL Solar Employees Tonya Jones and Site Supervisor Anthony Fair completing installation at Pine River-Backus Schools in October 2018.

About Region Five Development Commission

Enhancing the vitality and quality of life in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties is the mission of Region Five Development Commission. Resiliency, inclusion and collaboration are guiding concepts in achieving mutually shared goals that continue to evolve with local municipalities, state, federal, philanthropic, non-profit and social advocacy agencies. Visit www.regionfive.org to learn more.

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