



Oregon

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To: Energy Facility Siting Council

From: Christopher M. Clark, Senior Siting Analyst

Date: November 7, 2025

Subject: Agenda Item K (Action Item): Sunstone Solar Project – Appointment of Representatives to the Agricultural Mitigation Fund Advisory Committee for the November 21, 2025, EFSC Meeting

Attachments: Attachment 1 Memorandum of Agreement.

BACKGROUND

On November 18, 2024, the Council issued its Final Order approving the Application for Site Certificate for the Sunstone Solar Project and issued a site certificate authorizing the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic power generation facility on up to 9,442 acres of cultivated land zoned for Exclusive Farm Use within an approximately 10,960-acre (17-sq. mile) site in Morrow County. The site was, and currently is, primarily used for the production of dryland wheat.

In reviewing the facility's compliance with the Land Use Standard, the Council found that the proposed facility would use more high-value and arable farmland than permitted under OAR 660-033-0130(38), and as a result could not be approved without taking an exception to Statewide Planning Goal 3. To support its exception request, the certificate holder proposed to make a one-time payment of \$1,179 per acre of farmland occupied by the facility to an Agricultural Mitigation Fund that would be administered by the County according to the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) attached to this Staff Report. The Council found that economic benefits to the local agricultural economy that were reasonably likely to be generated by the fund supported an economic benefits reason, and that economic benefits were one of the reasons that justified an exception to Statewide Planning Goal 3. In granting the exception, the Council imposed Site Certificate Conditions PRE-LU-07 and GEN-LU-02 requiring the certificate holder to adhere to the terms of the MOA.

As part of its responsibilities in administering the funds, the County is required to establish a nine-person Advisory Committee to make recommendations on the distribution of funds based on the guidelines provided by the Sunstone Solar Agricultural Mitigation Plan. As required by the MOA, the fund must include two representatives selected by the Energy Facility Siting Council among its members.

The Council may select any person with subject matter expertise over statewide or regional agriculture issues pertinent to Morrow County dryland wheat farming to serve on the Committee. The Department consulted with staff at the Department of Land Conservation and Development and the Oregon Department of Agriculture to identify potential candidates. Based on this consultation, the Department recommends the Council appoint Eric Orem, from the State Board of Agriculture, and Jon Jinings from DLCD as its representatives on the committee.

RECOMMENDED APPOINTEES

Eric Orem – Mr. Orem is a first-generation farmer who currently serves on the State Board of Agriculture. Mr. Orem grew up in Morrow County and earned an associate degree in Marketing and Business Management from Blue Mountain Community College. In 2001, he began leasing a 2,400-acre dryland wheat farm from a farmer he worked for in high school. Since then, he has grown his farming operation to several thousand acres. Mr. Orem converted all acres to direct seed – no till practices to conserve the topsoil and utilizes GPS and other technologies to reduce overlap of fertilizers and chemical treatments. He runs a cow and calf operation, grows hay, and provides custom seeding and spraying.

Mr. Orem has disclosed that he currently custom farms a portion of the Sunstone site and is under contract to provide custom seeding and spraying at the site for the certificate holder. As an active wheat farmer in Morrow County, Mr. Orem also acknowledges that he has an interest in funding projects that benefits farmers and progressive farming practices in the county and may wish to participate in projects supported by the fund.

Jon Jinings – Mr. Jinings currently serves as the Department of Land Conservation (DLCD) and Development’s Community Services Specialist. Mr. Jinings was born in Corvallis and raised in Central and Eastern Oregon. He is a proud alumnus of Redmond High School and Eastern Oregon University. Prior to joining DLCD in 1997, Jon worked for local governments including Wallowa and Union Counties. His work for DLCD primarily focuses on rural land use issues. Hilary Foote, DLCD’s Farm and Forest Specialist, has indicated that she would be available to serve as an alternate as needed.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Council appoint Eric Orem (State Board of Agriculture) and Jon Jinings (Department of Land Conservation and Development) as its representatives for the Sunstone Agricultural Mitigation Fund Advisory Committee.