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Jul 06, 2010 - 6:00 AM

Farmer leads fight against solar energy sites

ORO-MEDONTE - Ten solar farm proposals could eat up thousands of acres of farmland, as the projects strip away topsoil, erect panels and drain aquifers to keep the panels clean, says a local agricultural advocate.

Ontario Farmland Preservation founder Bernard Pope said he doesn't oppose solar energy – he just wants the generating sites to be in the right locations.

"I was born on a farm in Innisfil and have been a farmer all my life. I'm incensed when I see misuse of farmland," said Pope, who now has a farm in Oro-Medonte.

According to its website, Recurrent Energy Limited of San Francisco is holding a series of public meetings outlining 10 projects – all within Simcoe County. The third in the series takes place July 7 at the Coldwater Community Centre, from 6 to 9 p.m., with a specific focus on Waubaushene 4 and 5 (see sidebar).

The company was awarded 154.5 megawatts of distributed solar power projects in Ontario's new feed-in-tariff program that's part of the Green Energy and Green Economy Act. The company expects to invest over \$400 million in its Ontario projects, which are not only in Simcoe County, but also in Lanark, Middlesex, Oxford, and Leeds and Grenville counties. Expected completion of the projects is early 2012.

Recurrent's Ontario projects are forecast to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 47,000 metric tonnes, produce 213.9 million megawatts of power and create 2,500 jobs across the province

They call for long-term leases – 25 to 30 years.

Pope noted, however, the environmental impact would be much longer-term, as the operations typically strip off topsoil and replace the soil with gravel. The solar panels can be as wide as 15 feet and some rotate to follow the sun. The panels also must be cleaned regularly to be most effective, he noted – which has water use implications in areas that depend on wells.

"It's industrial generation, not farmland," he said, adding the operations may ruin the rural lifestyle and impact property values.

He is encouraging citizens to rally together to protect farmland, as just as they did last year to protect aquifers and stop Site 41.

Recurrent Energy's meetings continue later this month, July 27 (for projects Midhurst 2 and 6) and July 28 (for projects Midhurst 3 and 4). Details and links about the projects can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

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Selected solar energy sites

Midhurst 2:

- 100 acres, north-northwest of Barrie in Springwater Township
- 1878 Matheson Rd., Springwater
- 4.8 million kWh production in first year

Midhurst 3:

- 95 acres, 14 km northeast of Barrie:
- 217 Line 5 North, Oro-Medonte
- 4.7 million kWh/year

Midhurst 4:

- 100 acres 14 km northeast of Barrie
- no municipal address: property bounded by Highway 11 North on the southwest, Line 6 north of Oro-

Medonte on the east and Line 5 North on the west

- 8.87 million kWh/year

Midhurst 6:

- 60 acres 10 km north of Barrie in Springwater township
- 2024 Old Second St., Midhurst
- 12 million kWh/year

Orillia 1

- 65 acres 7 km west-southwest of Orillia in Oro-Medonte
- 1599 Line 13N, Hawkestone
- 13.8 million kWh/year

Orillia 2

- 60 acres west-southwest of Orillia
- no municipal address; bounded by Line 13N on the west, 0.61 km southeast of Bass
- Lake Sideroad East, Hawkestone
- 14 million kWh/year

Orillia 3:

- 45 acres, 7 km west-southwest of Orillia
- 1683 Line 13 North, Hawkestone
- 9.2 million kWh/year

Waubashene 3

- 65 acres 31 km northwest of Barrie, in Tay township
- 1216 Wood Rd., Wyebridge
- 13.5 million kWh/year

Waubashene 4

- 80 acres 7 km north-northwest of Waubashene in Severn Township
- 1952 Irish Lane, Coldwater
- 11.4 million kWh/year

Waubashene 5

- 90 acres 7 km northwest of Coldwater in Severn Township
- 1524 Taylor Line, Coldwater
- 7 million kWh/year

Source: www.ontariofarmlandpreservation.org, with links to project documents from Recurrent Energy