

Region Five Solar Schools Project Summary **Updated 09/20/2016**

Synopsis

Region Five Development Commission (R5DC), a regional development and planning organization for five north-central counties, has been offered a grant of \$1,993,660 from Xcel Energy through the Renewable Development Fund (RDF) for a “Regional Schools Solar PV Demonstration” project. The grant will fund about 47% of the projected \$4,258,000 project budget to construct solar arrays on multiple school buildings in three school districts and at the Leech Lake Tribal College. R5DC is seeking an interested financing partner to provide tax equity and other financing.

R5DC is willing to act as the broker with the individual school districts and be part of a limited liability corporation (LLC) that owns the solar arrays and sells electricity to the schools. The goal is to achieve at least a 10-15 percent discount for schools on their current utility rates. R5DC will be responsible for managing the grant with Xcel grant, and is willing to perform additional accounting, billing and project management tasks.

Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL), an experienced solar developer based in Backus, is acting as the project construction manager for the project. The following school districts have agreed to participate in the solar projects: Little Falls, Pequot Lakes, Pine River-Backus and Leech Lake Tribal College (LLTC) in Cass Lake.

The projects will total 1,493 kilowatts of DC-rated solar capacity using solar equipment from tenKsolar. Most of the systems will be roof-mounted, with some ground-mounted system where roofs are not suitable for solar. All but one small solar array are in the service territory of Minnesota Power. The project also includes demonstration of solar-powered electric vehicle charging stations at a site to be determined.

In addition to building this initial round of solar projects, Region Five’s goals are to:

- Demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of a coordinated regional strategy for solar development
- Build expertise, experience and skills among local firms and providers for further solar development in Region Five
- Save schools money on their energy costs over time
- Integrate the solar arrays with STEM-based curriculum for students.

RREAL has conducted thorough inspections of all roof areas and sites and has initial layouts for all locations. Region Five is continuing to work with Minnesota Power to maximize the value of the energy that is generated on-site by the solar arrays. Students at LLTC may participate in project construction as trainees in solar installation work. The visibility of these projects may lead to other clean energy projects and additional local job creation that will benefit residents of the region.

Region Five is seeking a financing commitment by December 2016 for a project that will begin construction in the spring of 2017 and be completed by fall.