Habitat Friendly Solar Site Assessment Form for Project Planning

For solar companies and local governments to meet Habitat Friendly standards
5-26-2020

1) PLANNED % OF SITE DOMINATED BY NATIVE SPECIES COVER (wildflowers, grasses, sedges, shrubs, trees)

- ☐ 26-50% +5 points
- ☐ 51-75% +10 points
- ☐ 76% and above +15 points

Total points ☐

2) PERCENT OF PROPOSED SITE VEGETATION COVER TO BE DOMINATED BY WILDFLOWERS (not grasses and sedges)

- ☐ 10-20 % +5 points
- ☐ 21-30 % +10 points
- ☐ 31% and above +15 points

Total points ☐

Note: Projects may have "array" mixes and diverse border mixes; forb dominance should be averaged across the entire site. The dominance should be calculated from total numbers of forb seeds vs. grass seeds based on seeds per square foot(from all seed mixes to be planted).

3) PLANNED COVER DIVERSITY (# of species in seed mixes; numbers from upland and wetland mixes can be combined)

- ☐ 10-19 species +5 points
- ☐ 20-25 species +10 points
- ☐ 26 or more species +15 points

Total points ☐

4) PLANNED SEASONS WITH AT LEAST 3 BLOOMING SPECIES PRESENT (check/add all that apply)

- ☐ Spring (April - May) +10 points
- ☐ Summer (June - August) +5 points
- ☐ Fall (September - October) +5 points

Total points ☐

See BWSR Pollinator Toolbox about bloom season.

5) AVAILABLE HABITAT COMPONENTS WITHIN SITE OR WITHIN .25 MILES (check/add all that apply)

- ☐ Native bunch grasses for nesting +3 points
- ☐ Native flowering shrubs +4 points
- ☐ Clean, perennial water sources +3 points
- ☐ Created nesting feature/s (bee blocks, etc.) +4points

Total points ☐

6) SITE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

- ☐ Detailed establishment and management plan (see notes) developed with funding/ contract to implement. +15 points

- ☐ Signage legible at forty or more feet stating pollinator friendly solar habitat (see notes for number of signs). +5 points

Total points ☐

7) SEED MIXES

- ☐ Mixes are composed of at least 40 seeds per square foot. +5 points
- ☐ All seed genetic origin within 175 of site (see notes). +8 points
- ☐ At least 1% milkweed cover to be established from seed/plants. +10 points

Total points ☐

8) INSECTICIDE RISK

- ☐ Planned on-site insecticide use or pre-planting seed/plant treatment (excluding buildings/electrical boxes, etc.). -40 points
- ☐ Communication with local chemical applicators/neighbors about need to prevent drift from adjacent areas (see notes). +10 points

Total points ☐

Grand Total ☐

Gold Standard - Provides Exceptional Habitat **85+**

Meets Pollinator Standards **70**

Project Name: _____
Vegetation Consultant: _____
Project County: _____
Project Size: _____
Projected Seeding Date: _____

See notes related to the question on the back side of this form.

Notes:

Estimates of percent "cover" should be based on "absolute cover" (the percent of the ground surface that is covered by a vertical projection of foliage as viewed from above).

All project plans must include detailed vegetation establishment and management specifications to ensure the success of projects (see sample specifications on *BWSR's Habitat Friendly Solar Webpage*).

Seed mixes provided for projects need to show seeds per square foot for each species in the mix.

Question 1 - *Native plant species provide benefits to a wide range of pollinators and other wildlife species. The Minnesota DNR List should be used to determine if a species is native. Native species include wildflowers, graminoids (grasses, sedges rushes), shrubs and trees. The percent areal cover of native vs. non-native species should be estimated based on the seeds per square foot of all species to be used across all seed mixes.*

Question 2 - *There is a focus on wildflowers on this assessment form to maximize benefits to the approximately 450 species of native bees in Minnesota, honeybees and other pollinators. Wildflowers in question 2 refer to "forbs" (flowering plants that are not woody or graminoids such as grasses and sedges) and can include introduced clovers and other non-native species beneficial to pollinators. No noxious weeds or invasive plants can be included in the total.*

Question 3 - *Plant diversity adds to wildlife benefits, as well as the resiliency of projects. For this question, planned native and non-native species from all seed mixes can be combined for the total. Species must be planned to be used in a seed mix that will cover at least two acres at the site to be used for the total.*

Question 4 - *Having blooming species throughout the season helps support pollinator species. See BWSR's Pollinator Toolbox for a listing of bloom seasons for species.*

Question 5 - *The planting of native bunch forming prairie grasses, as well as native flowering shrubs is promoted as part of projects to increase nesting opportunities. If bunch grasses are included as part of plantings it is important that they are not mowed below four inches as part of yearly maintenance to ensure that they are not damaged. Habitat components must be within sites or within .25 miles of the site for this question.*

Question 6 -
To meet requirements for a long-term management plan projects must provide information about:

- *Timing of yearly inspections,*
- *Evidence of funding and a contract for management for at least the first three years.*
- *A detailed native vegetation establishment plan with detailed instructions for contractors.*
- *A detailed maintenance schedule for the first three years of the project listing timing of establishment mowing/ trimming, spot herbicide application, prescribed grazing or other management actions.*
- *Proposed maintenance schedule for year four and beyond.*
- *List of weed species that may become problematic at the site how they will be managed if needed.*
- *Maintenance needs for any constructed nest habitat for the project.*

Visible signage can play an important role in communicating the multiple benefits of Habitat Friendly Solar. Signs must be legible at forty or more feet in locations where the public can view the signs and state that the project is a Habitat Friendly Solar project. At least one sign is recommended every 20 acres up to a maximum of 5 signs.

Question 7 - *All mixes being used for the project must include at least 40 seeds per square foot to receive points for the first category. Please refer to pages 7-8 of BWSR's Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidlines for more information about appropriate seed sources. To obtain points for including milkweed in projects at least 1% must be in seed mixes based on seeds per square foot, or a combination of seed and containerized plugs could be used with a plan to cover 1% of the ground surface with milkweed.*

Question 8 - *It is important that seeds treated with insecticides are not used at project sites and that insecticides are not being sprayed at the site. To meet requirements for communication/registration with local landowners/applicators about the need to prevent drift from adjacent areas, information provided can be in the form of email communication or copies of letters. Communication must be provided to all landowners adjacent to the property including municipalities.*

Send completed forms, project plans, seed mixes (showing seeds per square foot for each species) and any communications with pesticide applicators to local government staff with decision making authority for the project or BWSR at Paul.Erdmann@state.mn.us if local government staff are not involved in reviewing the project.