



Mattawoman Watershed Society

Protecting and preserving Mattawoman Creek for the enjoyment of all.

Secretary Ben Grumbles
C/O Jeffrey.Thompson@maryland.gov
Maryland Department of the Environment
1800 Washington Boulevard
Baltimore, Maryland 21230

Re: MD Solar 1 LLC, Shugart Valley, Charles County— AI Number 162822, Permit Tracking Number 201861760; Social, Economic Justification Report (SEJ) produced by Origis

Dear Secretary Grumbles,

Thank you for considering these comments from the Mattawoman Watershed Society, Inc. (MWS). We wish to supplement our previous comments to express our opposition to the subject permit based on the additional information provided by Origis in response to the requirement that this project be socially and economically justified. This justification is due to the additional loss of assimilative capacity expected which will adversely impact the Tier II waters on the site, Wards Run 1 and Wards Run 2, leading to the permanent loss of ecosystem services and social value currently provided to the public.

According to the Maryland website for this project:

The SEJ will include an analysis of:

1. Environmental costs and benefits: tradeoffs between the environmental benefits gained by completing this project compared to the environmental benefits of preserving the high-quality aquatic resources;
2. Social contributions of the project compared to the associated cost of degradation of the high-quality aquatic resources; and
3. Economic contributions of the project compared to the economic impact of preserving the high-quality aquatic resources.

Our intent here is to establish various factors that make this additional analysis inadequate to justify the permanent degradation of these Tier II waters.

Please note that the report submitted by Origis is entitled “A *Social & Economic Assessment of the Shugart Solar Project*” and that the term “Justification” is missing from this entire report except the Section 9 title “*CONCLUSION AND SOCIAL ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION*”. (Emphasis added.) However, it is clear that MDE requested an SEJ, not just an assessment of revenue projections and that this report falls short of that request.

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The complacent tone of the report, touting that solar panels don't produce CO₂ seems self-serving without the acknowledgement that solar panels don't remove CO₂ as the current site condition does. The forest on this site supports the ecosystem services provided by the Wards Run watershed. The unsubstantiated estimates of rates of carbon sequestration for the replacement grasses that MIGHT be used seems like an attempt to avoid actual Tier II considerations. Any grasses grown on this disturbed heat island would not provide any public value for Charles County or even Maryland residents in comparison.

On page 31, It isn't clear how the fertilizer impacts of a site producing food are relevant to the Shugart SEJ, since neither the current use nor the proposed future use involve food production and the fertilizer impacts on the Tier II streams are not referenced. In fact, the impacts to the Tier II streams are casually summed up as "*VERY SMALL*" in the report which is disputed by the SEJ requirement itself. On the one hand, the applicant asserts that the MD DNR Report (2017) on the value of ecosystem services provided by forests in Charles County is not relevant (Page 29). Three pages later, the applicant relies on the DNR findings from the same report that, for every dollar invested in conservation, seven dollars of ecosystem service value is returned. This attempt to capitalize on the preservation of roughly half the site completely ignores the fact that the half being deforested currently has approximately the same ecosystem services value as the part planned for future preservation.

The Alternative Site Analysis portion of the SEJ report is especially irrelevant given that the applicant has never produced any analysis of alternative sites or why they were rejected. COMAR requires such a report before MDE can issue a wetlands permit but the applicant has never provided one and only asserts that "several" other sites were evaluated without providing any. On page 26, the applicant asserts that "An alternative site analysis is an integrated part of the utility scale solar site evaluation and development process." Therefore, why isn't any analysis offered as a justification in any document, as required by the SEJ and COMAR?

Perhaps the real truth about how the site was selected can be found on page 26. "**The solar project tract was available and the site satisfied Origis' selection criteria and the RFP criteria while the generation tie line tract remained subject to optimization and finalization after the RFP award.**" A true alternative analysis would have evaluated the other sites, against the "Origis selection criteria", COMAR, and the RFP criteria. It seems clear that Origis seems to like this site and didn't seriously look anywhere else.

Since the SEJ is intended to justify the impacts on Tier II waters, we wonder how any alternative sites for this project would be ranked for Tier II impacts compared to this proposed site.

We urge MDE to reject this "assessment" due to the inadequate justification as required by the SEJ requirement and deny the Solar 1 permit.

Sincerely,

Laurie Fortis Snow, President