

CHAPTER 216F

WIND ENERGY CONVERSION SYSTEMS

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216F.01 DEFINITIONS.

Subdivision 1. **Scope.** As used in this chapter, the terms defined in section 216E.01 and this section have the meanings given them, unless otherwise provided or indicated by the context or by this section.

Subd. 2. **Large wind energy conversion system or LWECS.** "Large wind energy conversion system" or "LWECS" means any combination of WECS with a combined nameplate capacity of 5,000 kilowatts or more.

Subd. 3. **Small wind energy conversion system or SWECS.** "Small wind energy conversion system" or "SWECS" means any combination of WECS with a combined nameplate capacity of less than 5,000 kilowatts.

Subd. 4. **Wind energy conversion system or WECS.** "Wind energy conversion system" or "WECS" means any device such as a wind charger, windmill, or wind turbine and associated facilities that converts wind energy to electrical energy.

History: 1995 c 203 s 1

216F.011 SIZE DETERMINATION.

(a) The total size of a combination of wind energy conversion systems for the purpose of determining what jurisdiction has siting authority under this chapter must be determined according to this section. The nameplate capacity of one wind energy conversion system must be combined with the nameplate capacity of any other wind energy conversion system that:

(1) is located within five miles of the wind energy conversion system;

(2) is constructed within the same 12-month period as the wind energy conversion system; and

(3) exhibits characteristics of being a single development, including, but not limited to, ownership structure, an umbrella sales arrangement, shared interconnection, revenue sharing arrangements, and common debt or equity financing.

(b) The commissioner shall provide forms and assistance for project developers to make a request for a size determination. Upon written request of a project developer, the commissioner of commerce shall provide a written size determination within 30 days of receipt of the request and of any information requested by the commissioner. In the case of a dispute, the chair of the Public Utilities Commission shall make the final size determination.

(c) An application to a county for a permit under this chapter for a wind energy conversion system is not complete without a size determination made under this section.

History: 2007 c 136 art 4 s 12

216F.012 SIZE ELECTION.

(a) A wind energy conversion system of less than 25 megawatts of nameplate capacity as determined under section 216F.011 is a small wind energy conversion system if, by July 1, 2009, the owner so elects in writing and submits a completed application for zoning approval and the written election to the county or counties in which the project is proposed to be located. The owner must notify the Public Utilities Commission of the election at the time the owner submits the election to the county.

(b) Notwithstanding paragraph (a), a wind energy conversion system with a nameplate capacity exceeding five megawatts that is proposed to be located wholly or partially within a wind access buffer adjacent to state lands that are part of the outdoor recreation system, as enumerated in section 86A.05, is a large wind energy conversion system. The Department of Natural Resources shall negotiate in good faith with a system owner regarding siting and may support the system owner in seeking a variance from the system setback requirements if it determines that a variance is in the public interest.

History: 2008 c 296 art 1 s 18; 1Sp2021 c 4 art 8 s 25

216F.015 REQUIREMENTS CODED ELSEWHERE.

Requirements governing certain towers are established in section 360.915.

History: 2020 c 100 s 19

216F.02 EXEMPTIONS.

(a) The requirements of chapter 216E do not apply to the siting of LWECs, except for sections 216E.01; 216E.03, subdivision 7; 216E.08; 216E.11; 216E.12; 216E.14; 216E.15; 216E.17; and 216E.18, subdivision 3, which do apply.

(b) Any person may construct an SWECS without complying with chapter 216E or this chapter.

(c) Nothing in this chapter shall preclude a local governmental unit from establishing requirements for the siting and construction of SWECS.

History: 1995 c 203 s 2

216F.03 SITING OF LWECs.

The legislature declares it to be the policy of the state to site LWECs in an orderly manner compatible with environmental preservation, sustainable development, and the efficient use of resources.

History: 1995 c 203 s 3

216F.04 SITE PERMIT.

(a) No person may construct an LWECs without a site permit issued by the Public Utilities Commission.

(b) Any person seeking to construct an LWECs shall submit an application to the commission for a site permit in accordance with this chapter and any rules adopted by the commission. The permitted site need not be contiguous land.

(c) The commission shall make a final decision on an application for a site permit for an LWECS within 180 days after acceptance of a complete application by the commission. The commission may extend this deadline for cause.

(d) The commission may place conditions in a permit and may deny, modify, suspend, or revoke a permit.

(e) The commission must require as a condition of permit issuance, including issuance of a modified permit for a repowering project, as defined in section 216B.243, subdivision 8, paragraph (b), that the recipient of a site permit to construct an LWECS with a nameplate capacity above 25,000 kilowatts, including all of the permit recipient's construction contractors and subcontractors on the project: (1) pay no less than the prevailing wage rate, as defined in section 177.42; and (2) be subject to the requirements and enforcement provisions under sections 177.27, 177.30, 177.32, 177.41 to 177.435, and 177.45.

History: 1995 c 203 s 4; 2005 c 97 art 3 s 19; 2023 c 7 s 30

216F.05 RULES.

The commission shall adopt rules governing the consideration of an application for a site permit for an LWECS that address the following:

(1) criteria that the commission shall use to designate LWECS sites, which must include the impact of LWECS on humans and the environment;

(2) procedures that the commission will follow in acting on an application for an LWECS;

(3) procedures for notification to the public of the application and for the conduct of a public information meeting and a public hearing on the proposed LWECS;

(4) requirements for environmental review of the LWECS;

(5) conditions in the site permit for turbine type and designs; site layout and construction; and operation and maintenance of the LWECS, including the requirement to restore, to the extent possible, the area affected by construction of the LWECS to the natural conditions that existed immediately before construction of the LWECS;

(6) revocation or suspension of a site permit when violations of the permit or other requirements occur; and

(7) payment of fees for the necessary and reasonable costs of the commission in acting on a permit application and carrying out the requirements of this chapter.

History: 1995 c 203 s 5; 2005 c 97 art 3 s 19

216F.06 MODEL ORDINANCE.

The commission may assist local governmental units in adopting ordinances and other requirements to regulate the siting, construction, and operation of SWECS, including the development of a model ordinance.

History: 1995 c 203 s 6; 2005 c 97 art 3 s 19

216F.07 PREEMPTION.

A permit under this chapter is the only site approval required for the location of an LWECS. The site permit supersedes and preempts all zoning, building, or land use rules, regulations, or ordinances adopted by regional, county, local, and special purpose governments.

History: 1995 c 203 s 7

216F.08 PERMIT AUTHORITY; ASSUMPTION BY COUNTIES.

(a) A county board may, by resolution and upon written notice to the Public Utilities Commission, assume responsibility for processing applications for permits required under this chapter for LWECS with a combined nameplate capacity of less than 25,000 kilowatts. The responsibility for permit application processing, if assumed by a county, may be delegated by the county board to an appropriate county officer or employee. Processing by a county shall be done in accordance with procedures and processes established under chapter 394.

(b) A county board that exercises its option under paragraph (a) may issue, deny, modify, impose conditions upon, or revoke permits pursuant to this section. The action of the county board about a permit application is final, subject to appeal as provided in section 394.27.

(c) The commission shall, by order, establish general permit standards, including appropriate property line set-backs, governing site permits for LWECS under this section. The order must consider existing and historic commission standards for wind permits issued by the commission. The general permit standards shall apply to permits issued by counties and to permits issued by the commission for LWECS with a combined nameplate capacity of less than 25,000 kilowatts. The commission or a county may grant a variance from a general permit standard if the variance is found to be in the public interest.

(d) The commission and the commissioner of commerce shall provide technical assistance to a county with respect to the processing of LWECS site permit applications.

History: 2007 c 136 art 4 s 13

216F.081 APPLICATION OF COUNTY STANDARDS.

A county may adopt by ordinance standards for LWECS that are more stringent than standards in commission rules or in the commission's permit standards. The commission, in considering a permit application for LWECS in a county that has adopted more stringent standards, shall consider and apply those more stringent standards, unless the commission finds good cause not to apply the standards.

History: 2007 c 136 art 4 s 14

216F.084 WIND TURBINE LIGHTING SYSTEMS.

Subdivision 1. **Definitions.** (a) For the purposes of this section, the following terms have the meanings given.

(b) "Duration" means the length of time during which the lights of a wind turbine lighting system are lit.

(c) "Intensity" means the brightness of a wind turbine lighting system's lights.

(d) "Light-mitigating technology" means a sensor-based system that reduces the duration or intensity of wind turbine lighting systems by:

(1) using radio frequency or other sensors to detect aircraft approaching one or more wind turbines, or detecting visibility conditions at turbine sites; and

(2) automatically activating appropriate lights until the lights are no longer needed by the aircraft and are turned off or dimmed.

A light-mitigating technology may include an audio feature that transmits an audible warning message to provide a pilot additional information regarding a wind turbine the aircraft is approaching.

(e) "Repowering project" has the meaning given in section 216B.243, subdivision 8, paragraph (b).

(f) "Wind turbine lighting system" means a system of lights installed on an LWECS that meets the applicable Federal Aviation Administration requirements.

Subd. 2. **Application.** This section applies to an LWECS issued a site permit or site permit amendment, including a site permit amendment for an LWECS repowering project, by the commission under section 216F.04 or by a county under section 216F.08, provided that the application for a site permit or permit amendment is filed after July 1, 2021.

Subd. 3. **Required lighting system.** (a) An LWECS subject to this section must be equipped with a light-mitigating technology that meets the requirements established in Chapter 14 of the Federal Aviation Administration's Advisory Circular 70/760-1, Obstruction Marking and Lighting, as updated, unless the Federal Aviation Administration, after reviewing the LWECS site plan, rejects the use of the light-mitigating technology for the LWECS. A light-mitigating technology installed on a wind turbine in Minnesota must be purchased from a vendor approved by the Federal Aviation Administration.

(b) If the Federal Aviation Administration, after reviewing the LWECS site plan, rejects the use of a light-mitigating technology for the LWECS under paragraph (a), the LWECS must be equipped with a wind turbine lighting system that minimizes the duration or intensity of the lighting system while maintaining full compliance with the lighting standards established in Chapter 13 of the Federal Aviation Administration's Advisory Circular 70/760-1, Obstruction Marking and Lighting, as updated.

Subd. 4. **Exemptions.** (a) The Public Utilities Commission or a county that has assumed permitting authority under section 216F.08 must grant an owner of an LWECS an exemption from subdivision 3, paragraph (a), if the Federal Aviation Administration denies the owner's application to equip an LWECS with a light-mitigating technology.

(b) The Public Utilities Commission or a county that has assumed permitting authority under section 216F.08 must grant an owner of an LWECS an exemption from or an extension of time to comply with subdivision 3, paragraph (a), if after notice and public hearing the owner of the LWECS demonstrates to the satisfaction of the commission or county that:

(1) equipping an LWECS with a light-mitigating technology is technically infeasible;

(2) equipping an LWECS with a light-mitigating technology imposes a significant financial burden on the permittee; or

(3) a vendor approved by the Federal Aviation Administration cannot deliver a light-mitigating technology to the LWECS owner in a reasonable amount of time.

History: *1Sp2021 c 4 art 8 s 26*

216F.09 MS 2010 [Repealed, 2011 c 97 s 34]