



Comments in Opposition to Proposed Changes to the RPS

Part 1, concerning Biomass Eligibility

submitted to the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) by the Massachusetts

June 6, 2019

The Massachusetts Sierra Club has over 130,000 members and supporters in Massachusetts for whom the proposed biomass eligibility changes to the RPS are cause for great alarm, for many reasons. Back in 2012 over 100,000 people endorsed a ballot petition that would have banned biomass from the RPS at that time. What we called “climate change” then is now the climate crisis. Science is clear: Time is now up. We have only a few years to dramatically reduce emissions, and we certainly cannot afford to go backwards. Thousands of citizens and Sierra Club members and supporters across the state advocated for raising the RPS last session because they know that the climate crisis is urgent. They did not lobby to increase the RPS only to see it watered down to include dirty energy such as biomass and waste to energy.

The idea in the proposal of extending the timeframe from 20 years to 30 years for biomass facilities to show a net reduction in CO₂ relative to fossil fuels is absurd. Any proposal whatsoever that incentivizes or facilitates increases in emissions, or inhibits transitioning to clean non-emitting electricity generation violates the GWSA mandates and violates the dictates of the UN IPCC report and the National Climate Assessment.

Not only must we reduce emissions, the IPCC report makes clear that we must now sequester CO₂ already emitted. Our forests in Massachusetts have by far the highest sequestration rate of any forests in New England because they are actively growing. When we kill trees we kill their carbon capture at the time we need it most - NOW - when there are no other effective means of sequestration.

Harvesting and burning is a non-renewable activity that depletes the soil needed for regrowth. Nature’s balance requires that wood decay in place in the forests.

DOER’s proposal would inflict immediate harm. It would:

- Increase pollution from particulate matter. Massachusetts cities and towns already have the highest asthma rates in the nation.
- Create a public and private health cost burden on the state and on families sickened by increased pollution
- Significantly degrade the quality-of-life of those affected by asthma
- Result in environmental injustice because wood-burning power plants would inevitably be sited near low income and disadvantaged people.

For these and other reasons the Massachusetts Sierra Club, its members and supporters, strenuously objects to all of the proposed biomass alterations to Class I and Class II RPS eligibility.



Comments in Opposition to Proposed Changes to the RPS

Part 2

submitted to the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) by the Massachusetts

Sierra Club

June 6, 2019

Testimony concerning biomass was submitted earlier as Part 1. This testimony concerns other aspects of the proposed changes.

The effect of the proposed changes on solar power:

1. **Decreasing the eligibility period of SREC 1 certificate to 40 quarters.** Solar facilities are long-term commitments, and the developers of these facilities have made these commitments on a much longer period than 40 quarters. Cutting the eligibility would hurt the viability of many of these projects, and cast doubt on DOER's commitment to encourage the development of renewable energy in the future.
2. **Negative impact on community solar.** By restricting the use of rooftop solar in many instances, including urban situations, the proposals impede the implementation of community solar projects, which are essential to extend solar's benefits to low- and middle-income residents.
3. **Impeding the development of solar on agricultural and intact-forest lands.** The proposals would restrict the amount of solar facilities that could be built on agricultural land. Since solar facilities and agriculture can exist side by side using shade management, this would unnecessarily impede solar power in places that need it, especially in western Massachusetts.
4. **Requirement that developments of more than 500 kW must be paired with storage.** Many large-scale solar facilities do not necessarily require storage facilities. For those facilities, making such a requirement would be an unnecessary impediment.
5. **Impedes ground-mounted solar.** While roof-mounted solar is preferable in dense and urban areas, ground-mounted projects are preferable in less urban places such as western Massachusetts.

Solar represents a considerable local industry in Massachusetts, a developed economy for Massachusetts industries and jobs for Massachusetts workers. Furthermore, solar energy is a key source of essential renewable energy, with as significant a role as off-shore wind and hydroelectric power. In order to stop greenhouse gas emissions within the next 12 years, it must be encouraged, not impeded.

The effects of the proposed regulations on other aspects of Massachusetts energy picture:

1. **The coordination role of DEP with the DOER is essential** if environmental concerns are to be met. Disconnecting the monitoring of DEP adds unnecessary risks and detracts legitimacy to projects that claim RPS certificates.
2. **Currently small hydroelectric dams must be recertified every ten years, which ensures that those sites retain their original purpose.** Deleting recertification and



allowing perpetual operation of the site with no further monitoring allows possible and serious deterioration of the site from its original environmental quality with no detection of such an occurrence or way of correcting the situation.

Thousands of residents and Sierra Club members and supporters across the state advocated for raising the RPS last session because they know that the climate crisis is urgent. They did not lobby to increase the RPS only to see it watered down to include dirty energy such as biomass and waste to energy.

DOER must understand that time is short, with only 12 years left to turn our GHG-generating machine around. Proposals to lengthen time spans, such as biomass recovery periods from 20 years to 30 years or lengthening the time span through impediments on solar for that key source of energy to reach its major decarbonizing role, would be physically dangerous and to a large extent morally averse. We must not go down that road.