

RENEWABLE ENERGY PRIMER

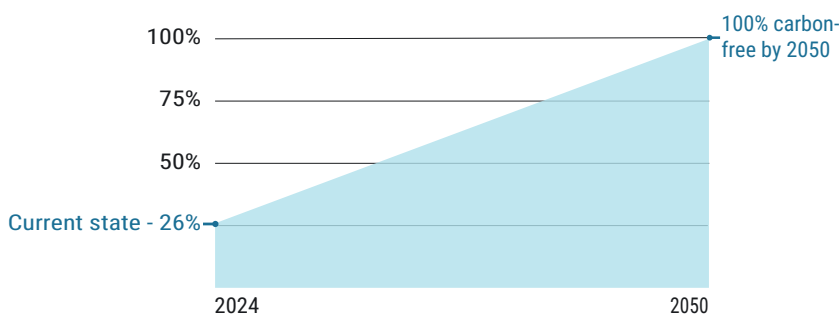


In 2019, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers established the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy and tasked it with a number of ambitious goals, including partnering to achieve 100% carbon-free electricity consumption in the state by 2050.

Despite the growing number of Wisconsin homeowners adopting residential solar, small-scale installations are expected to generate only 3% of the state's total energy needs.¹ Achieving Wisconsin's 2050 renewable energy goal will require significant investment in large-scale solar and wind projects.

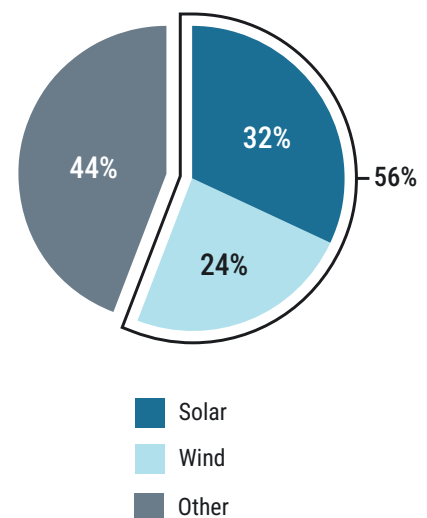
When a community invests in renewable energy, both residents and local governments benefit. Besides shared revenue, renewable energy also facilitates reduced nutrient runoff, improved air quality and diversified income for landowners. But this isn't to say investing in utility scale wind and solar is easy. In fact, at the county level, it can be downright confusing.

Wisconsin's Carbon-Free Energy Goal



Source: <https://www.eia.gov/state/?sid=WI#tabs-1>

More than half of Wisconsin's future energy needs will be met by utility-scale wind and solar.



Source: By 2050 <https://www.renewwisconsin.org/project/roadmap-to-netzero/>

1. <https://www.renewwisconsin.org/project/roadmap-to-netzero/>

The process for siting solar and wind...

A county's authority differs based on who is leading the development and the planned wattage of a renewable energy site. Renewable energy projects over 100 megawatts are regulated by the state's Public Service Commission (PSC). Counties do not have decision-making authority, but they can influence aspects of a project. For projects under 100 megawatts, counties are the regulatory body, which means they are responsible for impact assessments, contract reviews and community engagement efforts, among other things.

Wisconsin Siting Authorities for Utility Solar & Wind

	Developer-Led	Utility-Led
<100 MW	Local Authority	Local & State Authority
100 MW+	State Authority	State Authority

Within a county, the Zoning department has primary responsibility for facilitating the siting and permitting process. It can be challenging to interpret state statutes, county ordinances and developer contracts appropriately. The County Conservation office has a limited, but important, advisory role. County Conservationists often ensure adherence to local, state, and federal conservation policies, and advise on wetlands, waterways, or sensitive habitats that might be affected by a project.

Regardless of the size or type of a large-scale renewable energy project, county officials often play a key role in addressing community concerns about renewable energy projects. Local residents often seek information about property values, public safety and noise as well as reassurance that land use and ecological protections are in place. Providing factual answers in a timely manner can be difficult.

County Roles Engaging Wind & Solar Projects

	Zoning	County Conservation
Primary Responsibility	Facilitating siting and permitting process	Ensuring compliance Advising
Key Challenge	Interpreting statutes, ordinances and contracts appropriately Evaluating developer contracts fairly	Enforcing adherence to conservation policies Making appropriate conservation recommendations

Wisconsin Land+Water is here to help. It is our intention to provide the resources our members need to navigate Wisconsin's evolving renewable energy landscape.

Three Key Statutes

Wisconsin Statute 196.491

Regulates the construction and operation of large electric generating facilities and high-voltage transmission lines.

Wisconsin Statute 59.69

Outlines the powers and duties of county boards related to zoning and land use planning. Applicable to large-scale renewable energy projects <100 megawatts.

Wisconsin Statute 66.0401

Regulates the authority of local governments over solar and wind energy systems development.



To learn more, visit

<https://wisconsinlandwater.org/renewableenergy>