



# Habitat Friendly Solar Site Assessment Form for Established Plantings (after years 3-4)

For Solar Companies, Local Governments and Other Partners to Continue Meeting Habitat Friendly Solar Standards

Updated 12-22-2023

- 1) PERCENT OF SITE DOMINATED BY NATIVE SPECIES COVER (forbs, grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns)
- 40-54% +10 points
  - 55-69% +15 points
  - 70-84% +20 points
  - 85 and above +25 points
- Total Points

- 2) PERCENT OF SITE DOMINATED BY FORBS (not grasses, sedges and rushes)
- 5-8% +10 points
  - 9-16% +15 points
  - 17-25% +20 points
  - 26-34% +25 points
  - 35% and above +30 points
- Total Points

- 3) NATIVE COVER DIVERSITY (# of plant species with >1% cover)
- 1-9 species +10 points
  - 10-19 species +15 points
  - 20-25 species +20 points
  - 26+ species +25 points
- Total Points

- 4) SEASONS WITH AT LEAST THREE BLOOMING NATIVE SPECIES (check all that apply)
- Spring (April-May) +15 points
  - Summer (June-August) +5 points
  - Fall (September-October) +10 points
- Total Points

- 5) AVAILABLE HABITAT COMPONENTS WITHIN PROJECT SITE (check all that apply)
- Exposed soil between plants +5 points
  - Native flowering shrubs in border areas +5 points
  - At least 1% milkweed cover over planted area +5 points
  - Plant species with more than 3 flower colors +5 points
- Total Points

- 6) INSECTICIDE RISK
- Planned on-site insecticide use (excluding buildings/electrical boxes, etc.) -25 points
  - Communication with local chemical applicators/ neighbors about need to prevent drift from adjacent areas. +10 points
- Total Points

- 7) PROJECT MAINTENANCE
- Yearly monitoring of vegetation +10 points
  - Management (spot mowing, herbicide Application, grazing) at least twice a year To promote plant diversity +15
- Total Points

GRAND TOTAL

Gold Standard 85 points  
Meets Standard 70 points

Project Name:  
Project County:  
Project Size:  
Evaluation Date:

See notes related to the questions 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). To measure cover diversity use plots, and/or transects in addition to meander searches. Surveys can be conducted April through October, though the highest diversity will be visible during the summer.

All project plans must include detailed vegetation establishment and management specifications (and detailed long-term management planning is encouraged) to ensure the success of projects (see sample specifications on [BWSR’s Habitat Friendly Solar Webpage](#)).

**Question 1** - The [Minnesota DNR List](#) should be used to determine if a species is native. Native species can include forbs, grasses, sedges, rushes, and ferns.

**Question 2**- “forbs” are flowering plants that are not woody or graminoids such as grasses and sedges and can include introduced clovers and other non-native species (that are not noxious weeds or invasive species) beneficial to pollinators and located anywhere across the state.

**Question 3**- Plant diversity adds to wildlife benefits as well as the resiliency of projects. For this question native species that establish at the site and have greater than one percent cover can be combined for the total.

**Question 4**- See BWSR’s [Pollinator Toolbox](#) for a listing of bloom seasons for native 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 for native bees. It is important that planted bunch grasses are not mowed lower than four inches as part of maintenance activities to prevent damaging them. Exposed soil between plants is common in native prairies as well as solar sites established with native plants and plays an important role of supporting ground nesting bees as well as many other insect species. Large areas (such as 5x5 feet of exposed soil due to poor vegetation establishment) is not desirable and should not be the reasoning for added points. Estimates of milkweed percent cover should be based on milkweed present across the entire site. Having a variety of flower colors at sites increases benefits to pollinators. Flower colors can include blue, pink, purple, yellow, white, orange, red, green and brown. The Minnesota Wildflowers website allows for searching species based on flower color [Minnesota Wildflowers Categorized by Color](#).

**Question 6**- It is important that seeds treated with insecticides are not used at project sites, or that sites are not sprayed with insecticides. 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.

## **Question 7-**

Yearly monitoring of projects is important to identify any weed management needs and steps that can be taken to promote plant diversity. A variety of management methods can be used at sites to promote diversity including spot mowing, spot herbicide application, conservation grazing and hand weeding. It is important that flowering native plants are not mowed and that mowing is only done as needed when it will not have an impact on native plant diversity. In most cases, management activities should be conducted at least twice a year.

Submit completed form and a sufficient number of images to represent the vegetation across the site. At least three images are recommended for projects under 50 acres. Establishing photo reference points is also recommended. Submit the materials to BWSR at [dan.shaw@state.mn.us](mailto:dan.shaw@state.mn.us), as well as to any local government staff involved in reviewing the project. If points are awarded for communication about insecticide risk (see question 6 above) include copies of the communication to pesticide applicators.