Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Solar Energy Policy Statement

Approved by the Board of Directors September 24, 2026

Background:
The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) protects and restores exceptional places to provide our region with clean waters and healthy forests, wildlife and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations. To advance our mission, WPC collaborates with private landowners, state and federal agencies, local governments, conservation partners and a variety of grassroots organizations. WPC has played a leadership role in identifying the most ecologically-significant locations throughout the commonwealth and has protected more than 290,000 acres of natural lands in Pennsylvania through acquisition of properties or conservation easements. These areas include large tracts of unbroken forest, lands in high-quality watersheds and rare habitats harboring a diverse variety of native plants and animals. WPC seeks to protect these exceptional places through collaboration with our partners, working together to advance mutual conservation goals.

Broad Perspective:
Responsible renewable energy development is an important component in addressing the challenges and threats posed by climate change. Solar energy is significantly cleaner than fossil fuels and, appropriately planned and sited, can help individuals, organizations, governments and other entities reduce carbon emissions and achieve sustainability goals.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy supports safeguarding significant ecological places as energy sources are developed, including oil, natural gas, coal, wind, solar, biomass, hydropower and nuclear. It is essential that the development of energy sources in Pennsylvania be done in a manner that protects all of our lands and waters, and particularly our high-value ecological areas.

WPC supports the development of renewable energy sources, including appropriately-sited solar. WPC encourages the use of natural resource planning tools to minimize impacts to Pennsylvania's native plants, animals and habitats from solar development siting as well as installation of related transmission lines. Impacts can include forest fragmentation, open-space conversion, water quality degradation, loss of wildlife habitat and bird and bat mortality. WPC opposes the conversion of unfragmented forestland for grid-scale solar development.

In this document, *grid-scale solar*, also called “utility-scale” solar, refers to large solar power installations, often spanning many acres, that generate electricity to directly feed into the power grid for use offsite, and which typically generates more than 5 megawatts (MW) of electricity.[1] By contrast, *on-site solar* refers to limited, smaller scale solar installations that are installed locally on a property, frequently on rooftops or parking lots, and generate power in the location where it will be used.[2]

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[1] Penn State Extension “Grid-Scale Solar "Basics"” https://extension.psu.edu/grid-scale-solar-basics
[2] Pennsylvania DEP "Solar Energy for Use by Local Governments" https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/residents/solar-energy-resource-hub/local-government

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy supports and encourages:

- **using scientific data** from the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program to inform siting of solar energy development projects and transmission lines on a statewide and local level;
- **avoiding siting** solar installations and transmission infrastructure of any size in high-value ecological areas or in unfragmented forestland;
- **siting** grid-scale solar in areas that have already been disturbed, such as reclaimed surface mining locations, brownfields, and areas of minimal ecological value;
- **siting** grid-scale solar on agricultural lands that is done in a way that doesn't negatively impact prime agricultural soils or agricultural conservation practices;
- **continued research** to fill data gaps regarding the ecological impacts of solar energy development;
- **rigorous monitoring** of all phases of solar energy projects and transmission lines to determine potential ecological impacts, such as invasive species or changes in hydrology (among others);
- **appropriate mitigation** to reduce or eliminate impacts through the implementation of best management practices;
- **collaboration** among government entities, conservation organizations and the public to balance our energy needs while safeguarding ecologically significant animals, plants, habitats and important outdoor recreation destinations and viewsheds;
- **regional planning** efforts that fully engage and involve local communities to identify appropriate areas for siting;
- **use of technological innovations** that minimize or reduce the footprint of solar installations and electricity transmission infrastructure;
- **rooftop solar** programs that incentivize development on residential, commercial and public structures in order to limit impacts to green spaces; and
- **compatible uses**, such as the colocation of solar installations in suitable situations in conjunction with grazing or farming operations.

Land Protection:

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy has partnered with state and federal land management agencies to conserve thousands of acres of land that are open to the public for hiking and other outdoor recreation.

On lands conserved by WPC:

- WPC will allow, on a case-by-case basis, on-site solar development on lands it owns or holds a conservation easement on, consistent with the terms of the management plan or easement, and provided that no fragmentation of forestland occurs.
- The Conservancy will continue to include specific language addressing renewable energy development in our standard conservation easement terms, so that landowners are clear on what is and isn't allowed.
- WPC will not allow grid-scale solar on any if its properties unless it is a property the board of directors deemed appropriate for renewable energy generation or if it was acquired specifically for the purpose of renewable energy generation, and provided that no fragmentation of forestland occurs.

On lands WPC has conveyed to public agencies:

- WPC opposes development of grid-scale solar on lands it has conveyed to the state park system, state forest system, state game lands and other public lands.
- WPC supports limited, on-site solar development on public lands it has helped conserve, so long as conservation values are not adversely impacted and that forested landscape fragmentation is avoided.

On public lands generally:

- Likewise, WPC supports limited, on-site solar development on conserved public lands, such as state parks and state forests, so long as conservation values are not adversely impacted and that forested landscape fragmentation is avoided.
- WPC believes that grid-scale solar development can occur on non-conservation public lands with careful attention to avoiding impacts to conservation values, especially high-value ecological areas.

Individual Projects:

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is often asked to support or oppose specific development projects. WPC typically does not endorse or oppose individual projects. Rather, WPC advances its conservation mission through ongoing scientific inquiry and collaboration with our partners. WPC directs its resources to areas where we can be most effective in achieving our mission.

Conclusion:

Solar energy represents an opportunity for Pennsylvania to advance cleaner energy solutions and reduce carbon emissions, while at the same time addressing energy production needs. However, solar energy development must not happen at the expense of Pennsylvania's protected lands, waterways and natural resources. We believe that solar energy can be a solution that benefits all of our citizens so long as development can be done in a way that safeguards our natural assets.