Minnesota policies have put our state on a path beyond coal to clean energy that benefits our air, water, health and climate. But our work is not done! Nearly half of Minnesota’s electricity, and 75% of MN Power’s production, still comes from burning coal; which pollutes our air and water and is the largest source of harmful carbon pollution. Energy companies like MN Power must outline transition plans that continue down the path of replacing our old, coal-burning power plants with clean energy; especially, wind, solar and energy efficiency.

On September 1, 2015, MN Power proposed its 2015 energy plan. Although the plan takes a step forward by setting a timeline to replace its Taconite Harbor coal units, the plan still relies heavily on burning coal and fails to maximize energy efficiency, wind and solar.

AGING COAL PLANTS ARE A COSTLY PROBLEM
Fossil fuel pollution in Minnesota, mostly from coal, is responsible for over $2 billion in health and environmental costs each year.1 MN Power is already spending $350 million to keep burning coal at one of its units and will need to spend millions more on its aging coal units just to comply with current clean air safeguards.

MN Power has transitioned from 90% coal in 2005 to about 65% in 2015. According to MN Power’s own analysis, continuing to operate Taconite Harbor 1&2 and Boswell 1&2 into the mid-2020s was not the least cost option in 99 of 100 future scenarios considered. Even if MN Power phases out coal at both Taconite Harbor and Boswell 1&2 as proposed (Taconite Harbor 1&2 in 2020; Boswell 1&2 in 2024), it will still use coal for 45% of its electricity in 2025. That’s more than the national average of 39% coal-fired electricity—in 2013.2

The good news is clean energy solutions exist, and Minnesota has a strong and growing clean energy economy that employs over 15,000 people today. It’s time to call on MN Power to harness the power of clean energy solutions for our communities.

SAVING ENERGY MAKES SENSE
MN Power has been a state utility leader in saving energy, but there are more opportunities to reduce energy waste, especially with the largest energy users, which helps everyone save money.

WIND ENERGY SAVES CUSTOMERS’ MONEY
Thanks to Minnesota’s clean energy laws, including the state’s commitment to generate 25% renewable energy by 2025, MN Power is saving its customers money with its wind energy investments.4 Yet, MN Power’s 2015 energy plan does not include more investments in wind energy.
MINNESOTANS WANT CLEAN ENERGY, YET MN POWER PLANS FOR FOSSIL FUELS

In 2013, 8-in-10 voters in MN Power’s service territory supported “fundamentally changing the way we get energy to maximize wind, solar and efficiency.” MN Power claims to be forward-thinking with its energy plan, but still plans fossil fuels (coal and natural gas) for at least 66% of its power in 2030. MN Power will be making investments in its electric system over the next several years and needs to be thinking about how to build a 21st century clean energy system to serve its customers’ needs; instead of locking our fate into fossil fuels.

MN POWER’S LARGE ENERGY USERS PLAY A KEY ROLE

A majority of the electricity MN Power generates is used by large users, mostly mining and paper mill sites. In 2015, Minnesota lawmakers passed a law allowing MN Power to reduce energy costs for these large energy users and pass those costs on to the rest of their customers (not including Low Income Heating Assistance Program participants.) Minnesota families and communities should not be required to bear higher electricity rates and significant economic and environmental risk. These large energy users have a responsibility to help transition to affordable, reliable clean energy. These companies also need to take responsibility for reducing their energy waste to remain competitive in a global economy.

GROW THE CLEAN ENERGY ECONOMY IN NE MINNESOTA

As Minnesota and the nation transition to a clean energy economy, let’s position Northeastern Minnesota to be a part of the solution. Clean energy jobs are on the rise in the region, but more can be done with a clear regional clean energy and energy savings plan to grow good paying, family sustaining wind, solar and efficiency jobs in our communities.

SOLAR IS BLOOMING IN MINNESOTA

Xcel Energy plans to generate at least 10% of their electricity in Minnesota from solar in 2030 (that’s 1700MW.) By contrast, MN Power proposes to install a mere 33 MW by 2020 to meet the state’s 1.5% by 2020 solar standard and develop its first community solar garden. MN Power can and should do better by adding more solar beyond 2020 and making sure community solar benefits everyone who wants to take part.

YOU’RE PART OF THE SOLUTION TOO!

Call on MN Power and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to outline a plan to maximize energy efficiency, wind and solar in the transition beyond coal to clean energy for Northeastern Minnesota.

• Submit your comments to us, and we’ll deliver them to MN Power and the PUC for you! Email jessica.tritsch@sierraclub.org with “MN Power Energy Plan” in the subject of your email or the top of your letter.

• Volunteer with the Sierra Club or host a house party or community event to discuss Minnesota’s clean energy transition.

• Look into energy efficiency, solar or other renewable energy options for your home or business.

For more information or to get involved, contact Natalie Cook, natalie.cook@sierraclub.org, or Jessica Tritsch, jessica.tritsch@sierraclub.org, at 612-659-9124.

ENDNOTES

1. Polasky, Stephen and Andrew Goodkind, “Health and Environmental Costs of Electricity Generation in Minnesota”
3. Peak Campaigns, April 2013, https://sierranorthstarreleases.wordpress.com/2013/05/