

Wisconsin Embraces the Power of the Sun

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The country is running more and more on renewables - and solar energy is rising to the top. Although solar energy is still in its infancy, its potential is exponential. Currently, more than [81 gigawatts \(GW\)](#) of solar powers 15.7 million American homes across the country. According to a [new report](#) from the Solar Energy Industries Association and Wood Mackenzie, a record 3.6 GW of solar was installed nationwide in the first quarter of 2020, representing 40 percent of all new electricity generating capacity - the largest share of all new electricity. The Energy Information Association predicts [12.6 GW](#) of new utility-scale solar capacity this year.

Here in the Midwest, over the last few years, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) interconnection queue has changed from mostly wind projects to more solar being planned. Over 2,500 MW of solar are in the queue for Wisconsin alone over the next few years.

Wisconsin is currently powered by [214 MW](#) of solar energy. Although this amount seems small, it's still enough to light up over 34,000 homes. Wisconsin solar prices have decreased [40 percent](#) in the last five years, making it one of the cheapest renewable energy sources on the market. Solar investment has reached over \$382 million in the state.

Utilities are embracing solar

As one of the cheapest renewable sources, solar is a great asset for utilities. Utility-scale prices are at a record low, with a current cost range of [\\$16-\\$35 per megawatt hour](#). Since 2009, the cost of solar has dropped 88 percent. Investment in the solar industry grew to [\\$18.7 billion](#) in 2019. As utilities and states

across the region implement robust clean energy and decarbonization plans, they all have one thing in common: embracing large-scale solar.

Wisconsin-based utility Alliant Energy has major plans to increase its renewable energy portfolio with solar. It was recently announced that the utility is in the process of investing \$900 million to acquire [six projects](#) ranging from 50 MW to 200 megawatts (MW) each. These projects will be [developed](#) by NextEra Energy Resources, Ranger Power and Savion. The projects' combined capacity of 675 MW would more than triple the state's current solar capacity. Spanning across the state, from Grant County in the west to Sheboygan County in the east, this development would make Alliant the largest provider of solar energy in Wisconsin - a huge increase from its current standing of two MW.

In addition to offering clean, low-cost energy, these projects will greatly benefit local communities. Alliant's new projects will produce [\\$2.7 million](#) in revenue for host counties and townships. In the next three decades, the revenue to local communities will be over \$80 million. Landowners will also receive payments for hosting the solar farms in the form of land lease payments.

In 2019, Alliant launched its carbon-reduction plan, called the ["Clean Energy Blueprint"](#). This outline aims to derive 30 percent of the utility's electricity from renewables, and to cut carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2030. This announcement includes plans to close its remaining coal plants by the end of 2022, which will save customers "hundreds of millions of dollars in costs." The blueprint also calls for one gigawatt of solar by 2023.

Solar is harnessing the raw power of the sun to light up Wisconsin's homes at a low cost and providing job security for families. As demand increases for clean, reliable renewable energy from utilities and corporate and industrial purchasers, solar energy capacity will help clean up the electric grid. The sun is shining, and the future looks bright for solar.