



MEMORANDUM

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TO: Hal Cohen, VT DPS
FROM: Mark Kane
CC:
DATE: April 16, 2018
RE: Gilman Landfill Solar – PUC Docket

BACKGROUND

In 2016, SE Group was retained by the Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS) to provide aesthetic consulting services related to the development of a new solar electric facility at the Gilman Landfill property in Gilman, Vermont. During SE Group's review of the Petitioner's Certificate of Public Good and as presented in a memorandum to the DPS on July 6, 2016, SE Group ultimately concluded that, based on a site visit and review of the Petitioners proposed mitigation measures, the project would not create an adverse impact with respect to the scenic resources.

SITE REVIEW

In 2018, SE Group was re-engaged by DPS to help in its evaluation of a violation of the approved CPG. Based on materials provided by the Petitioner through their aesthetics consultant, Ben Oxender, in the establishment of the site for the development of the solar array, contractors working on behalf of the Petitioner cleared areas that had been indicated to remain.

During my initial review, it was the areas along River Road, to the west of the Project site, where the Project would be the most visible. Visibility from Baptist Church Road, also to the west of the Project site was also noted. In my memorandum from 2016, I noted that I had *"no additional recommendations for mitigation that we [I] feel would be reasonable. The narrow areas of potential visibility are generally inconsequential and attempts through landscaping to address them would not likely afford much benefit or value"*.

The largest of the areas inadvertently cleared was along the Project sites frontage with River Road. At about 2.3 acres, this area ("Cleared Area A"), was composed of mostly successional shrubs with some inclusions of small trees and conifers. These natural planting did contribute to the screening of the Project from River Road and a few residential properties that separate the Project site from the roadway.

Two smaller areas of inadvertent clearing were disclosed by Petitioner; one to the north of the proposed array ("Cleared Area B") and a very small area to the east ("Cleared Area C"). These cleared areas are about 0.52 acres and 0.04 acres respectively. A plan, prepared by the Petitioner, showing these areas is included on the following page.

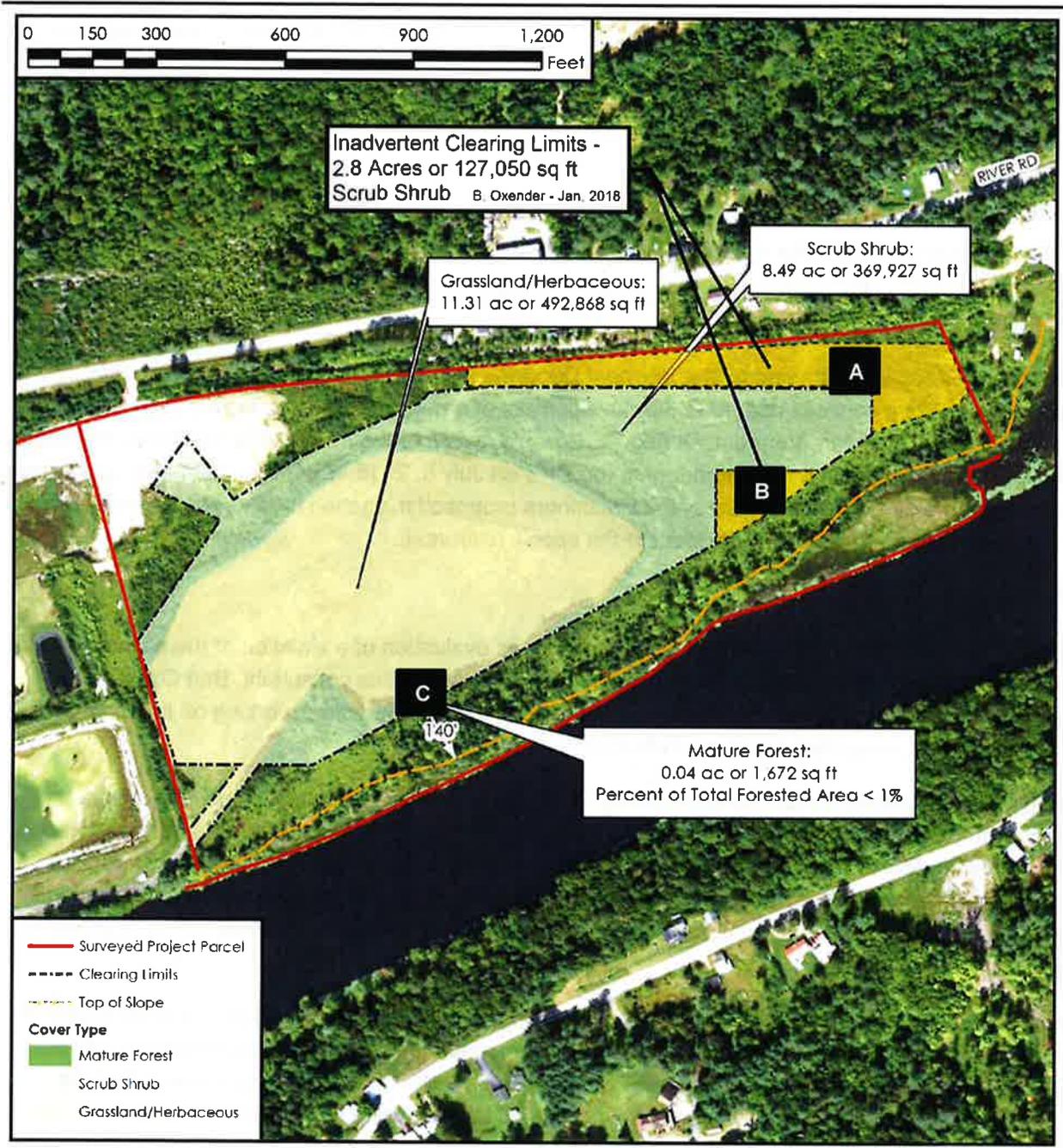


Figure 1 - Inadvertent Clearing Areas - Gilman Landfill Solar

On March 20, 2018, I attended a site visit with Hal Cohen and Ben Oxender to review the areas where the clearing was completed and consider the proposed landscape mitigation measures that the Petitioner has offered to address the situation. Representative photographs from this visit are provided below:



Figure 2- View looking North-East towards River Road from the Gilman Landfill Solar Site. Cleared Area A is in the foreground



Figure 3- Figure 1- View looking North towards River Road from the Gilman Landfill Solar Site. Cleared Area B is in the foreground

In evaluating the potential impact of these clearing areas on my original conclusions, I make a distinction between each of them. The impact of the clearing from Clearing Area B and Clearing Area C are not consequential relative to the concerns I had expressed in 2016. Clearing Area B does little to intervene between the Project site and offsite vantage points to the west. Clearing Area C is nominal in size. Clearing Area A, however, is more substantial to the screening of the Project. Its absence introduces more exposure of the Project from vantage points along River Road and nearby residential properties.

PROPOSED MITIGATION

In recognition of this issue, the Petitioner's aesthetics expert has proposed to install a series of coniferous plantings. The proposed layout and arrangement are provided below.



Figure 4- Landscape planting plan proposed by Petitioner

Overall the Petitioner is proposing 77 natural/field dug coniferous trees including Red Pine, White Pine, Black Spruce, Balsam Fir, and American Arborvitae. Installed heights for the trees range from 4 to 6 feet. As natural/field dug plant materials, they will typically be less full, but all represent species that can acclimate well to the setting.

The proposed landscape mitigation plan suggests installing the materials in somewhat random/naturalized pattern in both Cleared Area A and Cleared Area B. The Petitioner is also proposing to install along the Project fence line a green privacy material to assist in the screening of the Project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, I believe the Petitioners' proposed approach to mitigate the impacts from the inadvertent clearing are appropriate and will help ameliorate the impacts that have resulted. The quantities and species proposed are reasonable given the setting and situation.

I would recommend the following additional steps or changes to the proposed mitigation to help assure that it has the greatest possible benefit:

1. Limit the installation of all proposed plantings to Cleared Area A, where I believe it will be most effective in addressing offsite visual impacts.
2. Install the proposed plantings in a more strategic fashion; focusing on areas where the adjacent natural vegetation is particularly thin or where the inadvertent clearing has increased visibility of the Project site from River Road and/or adjacent residential properties.
3. Allow areas where the inadvertent clearing has occurred to grow up naturally.
4. Avoid any future disturbance in these areas except for required periodic maintenance of the proposed mitigation plantings.
5. Require that, following the installation of the mitigation plantings, the site be reviewed by DPS to confirm adherence to the plan.
6. Impose a requirement that, for a three-year period following the installation of the plantings, a vegetation monitoring plan be prepared, whereby the Petitioner would provide written and photographic documentation and attest to the continued health and effectiveness of the installed mitigation plantings.

With these measures, I believe the impact of the inadvertent clearing can be rectified and no adverse impact on the scenic resources of the area will result.