



WETCC Trades Building rendering

Building the clean energy workforce

Something transformative is happening in Mahanomen, Minnesota, and it's not just the solar panels outside the White Earth Tribal and Community College's (WETCC) campus. It's the foundation of a clean energy future being laid for northern Minnesota's communities and workforce.

Fresh Energy is proud to be collaborating with WETCC to help advance its innovative Trades Building project — a game-changing initiative to train the next generation of skilled tradespeople who will build Minnesota's clean energy future across northern Minnesota, all while creating economic opportunities in rural communities.

The WETCC Trades Building will create a new wing on WETCC's campus to train students for high-demand careers, including its NABCEP-certified solar program, energy auditing, HVAC and electrical work, and traditional Anishinaabe trades. Fresh Energy is working with WETCC to help secure funding at the Minnesota Legislature for the project, which will equip Minnesotans with trained professionals helping to build our clean energy future, from solar systems to home weatherization and electrification.

For residents of Mahanomen and surrounding communities, the nearest technical school is over an hour's drive away, putting skilled trades careers out of reach for many. This initiative breaks down those barriers, bringing training directly to a region with high unemployment and limited opportunities.

"This is a win-win," explains Anna Sheppard, WETCC president. "Our communities gain the skilled workforce to drive economic growth, while our local and surrounding community gain access to family-sustaining careers right here at home."

The project is shovel-ready with secured land, completed architectural renderings, and established construction budgets. Training could begin as early as fall 2027, creating a deep bench of skilled workers ready to build and maintain the infrastructure of Minnesota's clean energy transition.

Rural Minnesota faces unique challenges in the energy transition, from aging infrastructure to limited economic opportunities. The WETCC project directly addresses these challenges by training local residents to implement clean energy solutions while building vibrant, resilient communities.

"Fresh Energy is working to ensure the clean energy transition happens in every corner of Minnesota," said John Vaughn, managing director, community and economic development at Fresh Energy. "We need skilled workers in every community to make it happen. This program will benefit individuals, the community, and our state's future."

As Minnesota works toward ambitious climate goals, initiatives like the WETCC Trades Building remind us that the path to decarbonization isn't just about reducing emissions — it's about creating a more equitable, prosperous future for all communities across our state.



Local leaders visited the State Capitol in February to talk about their project (L to R): Dan King, president, Red Lake Nation College; Rep. Marion Rarick; Dr. Helen Zaikina-Montgomery, president, Leech Lake Tribal College; Rep. Heather Keeler; and Anna Sheppard, president, White Earth Tribal and Community College.

Letter from leadership



Hello and thank you for reading our Energy Matters newsletter! I hope the stories we share here give you a boost in this challenging time for clean energy and climate progress.

I was honored when Fresh Energy's Board of Directors asked me to serve as interim CEO. Our team of dedicated experts has not missed a beat, achieving major decarbonization progress here in Minnesota, despite federal headwinds.

Our Vision 2030 strategic framework sets a strong path to an equitable, decarbonized economy. With a multi-venue approach that allows us to make progress in any political climate, Fresh Energy is well positioned to keep moving forward. We also possess the skill and hard-won experience to defend landmark laws now under threat.

Here and on our website, you'll see some details of our effective state-level policy progress, including at the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission where key decisions about our energy system are made.

Fresh Energy is known for our ability to pull the highest levers for change in the politically complex and very technical work of energy policy. Our Search Committee is selecting a new CEO with the deep energy expertise needed to drive progress now and into the future. Stay tuned for an update and thank you for your support!

Sarah Clark
Interim Chief Executive Officer

Regulators advance clean energy



A victory for Minnesota's clean energy future arrived when the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission ordered Xcel Energy to include an impressive clean energy portfolio in the utility's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) with 3,300 megawatts (MW) of wind, 1,550 MW of solar, battery storage, and Xcel's first Virtual Power Plant. (Check out our inside story for more about VPPs!)

Xcel Energy initially proposed building six new natural gas plants instead, which Fresh Energy helped avert through a detailed technical analysis. While complex, these proceedings are where decisions about Minnesota's energy future happen. Learn about our work on this IRP by scanning the QR or visiting bit.ly/Xcel-IRP.



Opening doors for electric vehicle buyers



Minnesota's clean cars rule is celebrating four years, and the results speak volumes. More auto dealers across the state are now offering electric vehicles (EVs), giving Minnesotans greater choice. The impact is clear — today, more than 100 EV models are available to U.S. consumers!

While some dealers initially had concerns, the reality has been positive: The rule required at least 8% of sales to be electric by model year 2025, which already matches last year's EV sales. That's resulted in more dealers carrying EVs on their lots.

Fresh Energy's also working on policies to build more EV charging across the state, especially in multifamily dwelling units. We aim to cut transportation emissions and ensure Minnesotans have access to EVs, boosting choice and improving air quality.

Progress on gas decarbonization



We are thrilled that our engagement in Xcel Energy's gas innovation plan at the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission successfully ensured the plan includes climate-friendly heating measures like energy efficiency and electrification. It also supports two innovative pilots: a low-income home electrification and retrofit project and a commercial heat pump/thermal energy project.

Emissions from buildings are growing faster than any other sector in Minnesota. Through regulatory intervention and other approaches, we are working to lay the groundwork for new policies, like a Minnesota Heat Standard, that help Minnesota meet its climate goals.

Learn more about these stories at fresh-energy.org

Virtual Power Plants power a cleaner grid



Imagine your home helping the clean energy transition. Across Minnesota, everyday appliances are becoming part of an innovative approach to managing our electricity system. **It's called Demand Response, and its more advanced cousins are known as Virtual Power Plants (VPPs). Together, these technologies might be our most powerful yet overlooked tools for a clean, affordable, and reliable energy future.**

Don't let the technical names fool you — Demand Response isn't a building. It's thousands of homes and businesses working together to support the electric grid by reducing usage when needed. When electricity demand peaks, utilities can shift electricity use of enrolled air conditioners, heat pumps, and other smart appliances in order to reduce the strain on the grid. What makes a VPP different is that it also adds actual electricity generation, like solar panels and battery storage, that can feed power back to the grid.

Demand Response isn't new. Minnesota electric cooperatives have been adjusting enrolled members' electricity use for decades to increase reliability and reduce costs. What's new is the expanded purpose: **Demand Response and VPPs are now recognized as crucial tools to cut carbon emissions and avoid building expensive, new natural gas plants that only run a few hours a day or year.**

Minnesota co-ops already manage about 400,000 home appliances that can reduce peak demand by 200 megawatts — equivalent to a large power plant! Xcel Energy already has a Demand Response program and just received approval to start its first VPP program, which Fresh Energy supported in Xcel's recent Integrated Resource Plan.

For residents, enrolling can mean lower electricity bills, improved grid reliability, and progress toward a clean electricity system. Smart devices make participation seamless — your thermostat, water heater, or EV charger can automatically shift energy use to off-peak hours, earning you discounted electricity rates.

The future looks even brighter as VPPs, buildings with solar panels and batteries, and even some electric vehicles all begin working with each other to feed electricity and technical reliability services back into the grid when they are needed most.

Want to learn more? Our team is engaging with regulatory proceedings at the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to incorporate more VPPs and Fresh Energy's Mike Schowalter was on MPR to discuss how they're transforming our energy landscape.



Donor profile



For Eric Larson and Geeta Dash, the path to supporting Fresh Energy started with personal climate action. They began by making their home more efficient, installing solar panels, and switching to electric vehicles. But they wanted to create bigger change.

“We realized that individuals can only do so much,” Eric explains. “It’s really effecting policy change that will make a bigger difference with reducing emissions.”

Eric and Geeta first learned about Fresh Energy when they heard our own J. Drake Hamilton speak at their church. After becoming donors, they decided to join our Power Circle in 2024.

“We want to create a clean energy future that helps the economy and elicits buy-in from people of all political persuasions,” Geeta says. Eric adds, “We’re really excited about the future, Fresh Energy’s work at the Capitol, and the voices they represent.”

When asked what they’d say to others considering giving to Fresh Energy, Eric’s enthusiasm was clear: “Do it! We really respect Fresh Energy’s integrity, the intellect behind the policies and activities, and the focus on bringing clean energy to Minnesota.”

You can join Eric and Geeta by making a Power Circle contribution of \$1,000 or more today. **Please contact Meggie LaValley at lavalley@fresh-energy.org.**



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Leading from the North

Fresh Energy is speeding Minnesota's transition to a clean energy economy, which will ensure that our region enjoys good health, a vibrant economy, and thriving communities today and for generations to come.



Save the dates!

Registration opens soon at fresh-energy.org/events for these Fresh Energy fan-favorite gatherings.



Sept.
30

2025 Benefit Breakfast

Mark your calendars for Fresh Energy's annual Benefit Breakfast on **Tuesday, September 30, 2025!** We will be back at the RiverCentre in Saint Paul with virtual options available for those who cannot join in person. Our featured speaker will be announced soon and planning is already underway for another engaging and interactive Fair of the Future before and after the program!

Interested in becoming a sponsor or Table Captain? Contact Meggie LaValley at lavalley@fresh-energy.org to learn more.

Lagers & Legislation

Let's unpack the legislative session together. Join us for our end-of-session **Lagers and Legislation event on the evening of May 21.** All are welcome and the location and registration details will be shared soon.



May
21

Fresh Frolic

Celebrate summer with us on **July 24 from 5-7:30 p.m. at "Fresh Frolic: An all-electric party"** at The Trailhead at Theodore Wirth. Ticket sales open soon for our party featuring all-electric tech and more!



July
24



and more! Check out fresh-energy.org/events or scan the QR code!