Fall 2026

energy matters



Forging a modernized iron legacy

Since 1884, Minnesota's Mesabi Iron Range has helped build America. In fact, the Lake Superior region still supplies about 94% of the iron ore used in the United States today and plays a vital role the American steel supply chain.

Today, the Iron Range stands at a pivotal moment.

For decades, ironmaking and steelmaking relied on energy-intensive blast furnaces that burn coke, a coal-based product, to melt iron ore and create the metallic iron required to make steel. However, steelmakers are modernizing and investing in newer ways to produce steel, including direct reduced iron (DRI) and electric arc furnaces (EAFs), which can produce the same high-quality products, but with significantly reduced energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

The catch? These modern steelmaking processes require a slightly higher-grade iron ore pellet than what was traditionally mined and produced in Minnesota.

But that's not a dealbreaker, and, in fact, several Minnesota producers are already supplying millions of tons of DR-grade iron ore pellets needed for DRI and EAF processes with plans to significantly increase production in the near term. These manufacturers include U. S. Steel and Cleveland-Cliffs, newcomer Mesabi Metallics, and future producer MagIron.

As steel manufacturers modernize their facilities, it has become clear that the regions capable of supplying the raw materials, energy resources, workforce, and infrastructure will be best positioned to attract investment and grow long-term economic opportunity. This is something that Minnesota must not miss out on.

For Fresh Energy, this opportunity highlights how our state can build on its industrial strengths while positioning itself to be competitive in a low-carbon economy. The Iron Range has an incredible opportunity to remain an economic engine while helping meet the demands of a rapidly changing national industrial landscape.

New approaches to steelmaking are being explored around the world. Our state's world-class iron resources, strong manufacturing expertise, skilled workforce, and more put the state in a position to compete for these emerging opportunities. Additionally, Minnesota's growing supply of carbon-free electricity is another advantage. Many next-generation ironmaking technologies will require significant amounts of electricity, creating an opportunity to support industrial growth while reducing emissions.

Fresh Energy sees the opportunities around clean iron production as just one example of a larger transformation underway across Minnesota's industrial sector.

The Iron Range helped build America once before. With thoughtful planning, continued innovation, and collaboration among industry leaders, researchers, communities, utilities, and policymakers, it can also help build the next generation of American manufacturing.

Letter from leadership



"Seizing the opportunity." That was one of the recurring themes that Jesse Jenkins, the keynote speaker at our 11th annual Benefit Breakfast, wove throughout his address and something that I keep coming back to as I reflect on that inspiring morning.

Every day, Fresh Energy's staff work to seize critical opportunities to advance the clean energy transition in Minnesota. This takes both determination and pragmatism. However, this is a crucial moment in history where we are not only working to ensure that Minnesota withstands federal headwinds but also creating a model for how the clean energy transition should move forward in Minnesota. Not an easy undertaking!

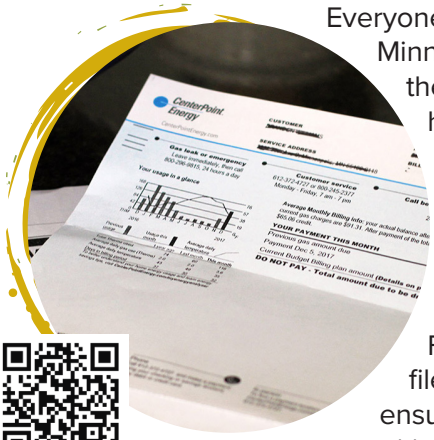
Over my nearly nine years at Fresh Energy, one of the most significant things I've learned is that change happens when people decide the moment is theirs to seize. I think that's why Jesse's message resonated so strongly with me and our nearly 600 breakfast guests.

We're so grateful to everyone who came out that morning and to all of you reading this newsletter. Your support is what makes this work possible, and your generosity is what allows Fresh Energy to show up, advocate, collaborate, and lead.

Sincerely,

Margaret Cherne-Hendrick, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

Getting energy affordability right



Everyone is feeling the cost of living climb. While Minnesota's average energy costs are among the lowest in the country, averages can hide how heavy a utility bill is for households with low or moderate incomes. That's why the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission has opened a statewide investigation into the affordability of electric and natural gas services.

Fresh Energy is at the table, and we've filed comments urging regulators to ensure an affordable, equitable clean energy transition by measuring affordability by energy burden — the share of household income spent on energy — and to explore income-based rates and discounts. More public sessions are coming in November and December 2026, and Fresh Energy will be advocating every step of the way. Follow along at bit.ly/mn-affordability.

Advocating for EV access, infrastructure



As a result of Fresh Energy's advocacy, Minnesota has been selected as a priority state for the Energize Coalition, a new alliance of organizations working to expand and accelerate electric vehicle charging infrastructure and strengthen the electric grid across the country.

For years, Minnesota has been at the forefront of transportation electrification in the Midwest, thanks to utility-led planning, investments in charging infrastructure, and policies that expand access to electric transportation. That strong foundation, coupled with Fresh Energy's robust track record on state policy, made Minnesota a natural fit for the coalition. As the work ramps up in Minnesota, Fresh Energy will be collaborating with long-standing partner organizations.

A morning of momentum



Nearly 600 supporters, advocates, and clean energy leaders filled the Saint Paul RiverCentre on October 8 for our 11th annual Benefit Breakfast, "Leading the Charge."

Keynote speaker Jesse Jenkins, one of the nation's leading energy systems experts, called on attendees to advance clean energy progress whenever and wherever they can. Tonya Allen, president of the McKnight Foundation, offered a hopeful reminder that the transition to clean energy gains momentum when we all work together. Fresh Energy CEO Dr. Margaret Cherne-Hendrick, emphasized that that no matter what the political climate, "Fresh Energy's resolve remains strong." Watch the full event by scanning the QR or visiting bit.ly/breakfast_26, and join us next year on September 30, 2027!

Learn more about these stories at fresh-energy.org.



Minnesota is moving beyond gas

How do we make sure that electric utilities are building an affordable, equitable clean energy transition that works for everybody? In Minnesota, part of the answer is a regulatory process called an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) at the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. Fresh Energy has been engaging in IRPs for decades, and they're one of the most powerful tools for shaping our state's clean energy future. **This fall, Fresh Energy and our partners celebrated a significant win in Minnesota Power's IRP.**

Minnesota Power, the electric utility that serves Duluth and northeastern Minnesota, proposed building a large, 750-megawatt natural gas plant in its latest IRP. A plant like that would run for decades, well past the 2040 deadline when Minnesota's 100% clean electricity law requires utilities to deliver carbon-free power. **Building this gas plant would mean costly workarounds to comply with the law and locking customers into a fossil fuel investment that doesn't align with Minnesota's climate targets.**

So Fresh Energy and our partners at Clean Grid Alliance, the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, and Sierra Club got to work, collaborating with independent experts in energy modeling, reliability, transmission, and health and equity to probe the utility's assumptions outlined in its IRP. We found that Minnesota Power overestimated the cost of wind, solar, and batteries; underestimated the cost of natural gas turbines; and modeled itself as an energy "island" disconnected from the regional grid. With those assumptions corrected, the numbers pointed to a cleaner, more affordable path with no new gas plant at this time.

In early September, the Commission agreed with our filings and testimony. Regulators did not approve the gas plant and ordered the utility to further consider alternatives.

But that's not all: they also directed the utility to add 600 megawatts of carbon-free resources by 2030, doubling the wind and battery storage in its original plan, and to expand demand response programs. The utility will also need to be more transparent in how it forecasts large, new energy users like data centers, improve supplier and workforce diversity, and take steps to retire the Hibbard biomass plant in Duluth.

Fresh Energy applauds the Commission's decision and is celebrating this strong outcome in Minnesota Power's first IRP since its acquisition in 2025.

But the work's not finished: Minnesota Power will return to the Commission soon to outline a new resource plan, and Fresh Energy will be back at the table making the case for an affordable, equitable clean energy system. **Read more at bit.ly/mp-irp.**

Donor profile



Holly Einess and Brian Kantar have supported Fresh Energy ever since Holly attended our annual Benefit Breakfast several years ago with a friend. As a Minnesota Master Naturalist, Holly has put her ecological values into practice with solar panels on their previous home; a heat pump, mini-splits, and an induction stove at their current one; and using a bike to get around.

But Holly knows personal action only goes so far. "I feel like policy provides a much bigger lever than individual actions," she said. "To be part of that larger solution is gratifying. It's more bang for your buck."

Holly loves seeing solar farms planted with pollinator habitat. "A big thing I care about is habitat for wildlife," she said. She loves that Minnesota's energy transition is creating healthier ecosystems for humans and for our non-human kin.

"If you're even a teeny bit concerned about climate change, donating to Fresh Energy will plug you into a big network of people who are working to fix it," she said.

As Power Circle donors, Holly and Brian are supporting Fresh Energy with consistent charitable giving and by including us in their will.

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

Fresh Energy

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Noteworthy News

Catch the Clean Energy News Report with Don Shelby that debuted at our Benefit Breakfast last month!
Visit bit.ly/fresh-report





Building a shared vision

It's clear that when Minnesotans come together around a shared vision, we can do almost anything. Fresh Energy believes that is especially true when it comes to clean energy and climate. **That's why we are thrilled to be part of a coalition of clean energy organizations bringing the "GROW Agenda" to our work this fall as we hone our strategy in a new political landscape and gear up for the 2027 legislative session.**

Minnesota's clean energy industry can drive jobs, affordability, and economic growth — but we must keep investing in it. To that end, the GROW Agenda introduces a shared framework for advancing affordability, innovation, and economic opportunity across the state. Together, these pillars create a roadmap for building a stronger economy powered by Minnesota ingenuity and homegrown energy.

This work reflects how Fresh Energy is preparing for the years ahead. While elections shape the political landscape, Minnesotans' need for affordable energy, good jobs, and resilient communities remains constant.

By bringing organizations together around shared goals, we are helping lead the conversation about what comes next and building the broad coalition needed to turn ideas into action.

Learn more at growmn.org or by scanning the QR.