

CATF Minutes

September 18, 2025 | 2:00 pm

Members in Attendance:

Krystle Baecker, Pri Burnham, Jane Fitkin, Christy Foye, Brian Hummel, Bob Kulisheck, Emily Leach, Brad Neumann, Tyler Penrod, Chloe Ravenscraft, Anna Solberg, Dave Stensaas*, Jes Thompson, Darlene Walch*

Guests in Attendance: Jason Brynick, Alec Bush, Claire Christen, Dan Freeborn, Gradon Haehnel, Matthew Krause, Kim LeTourneau, Cathy Ruprecht, Cera Shelafoe, Amy Stephens

*Joined via Zoom

a. Welcome and Introductions

b. Special Presentation

Dan Freeborn (communications), Jason Brynick (project manager - lead of solar project), Gradon Haehnel (CEO of UPPCO) | UPPCO

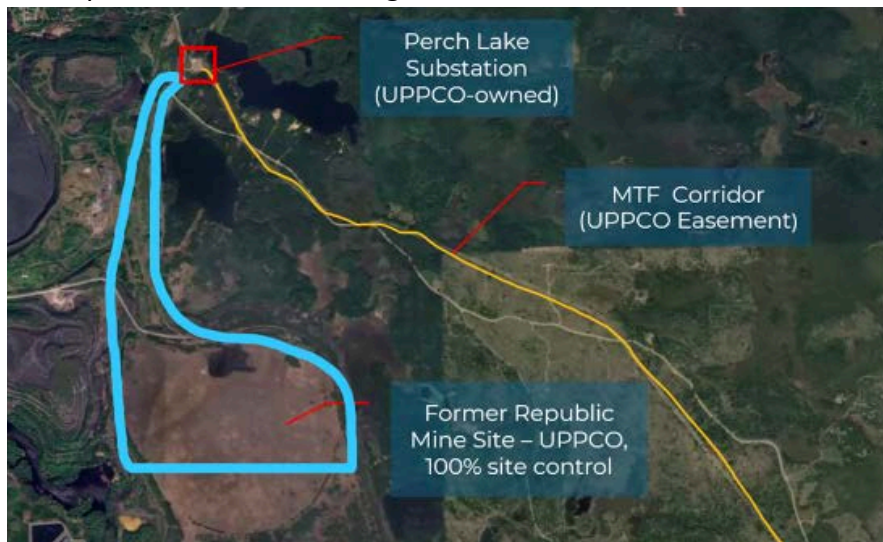
From Iron Ore to Solar Power: UPPCO prioritizes stewardship through purposeful development on a former mine site with the [Republic Solar Project](#). UPPCO intends to develop a 62.5 MW solar project in Republic Township on the tailings of the former Republic Mine site. The current land agreement includes certain lease and easements with the intended Point of Interconnection at the UPPCO-owned Perch Lake substation.

Presentation Notes

- The Republic Solar Project started in 2018 as part of an integrated planning resource project - required by the state to do modeling on electric usage and how we're planning to meet that growth in electricity.
- [UPPCO](#) is an investor-owned utility in Michigan. They serve much of the UP (10 counties total)

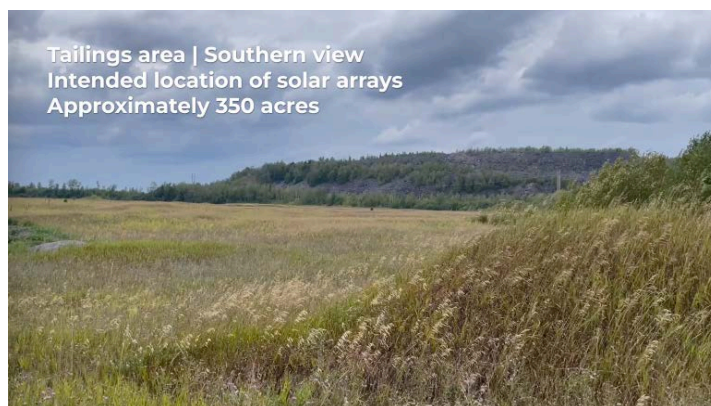
- 200 employees
- ~ 54,000 customers
- Largest load center in Keweenaw
- Largest operation center out of Ishpeming
- Corporate headquarters out of Marquette
- 7 hydroelectric generation stations
- 58 substations
- 4,468 miles of powerlines
- Additional notes:
 - 20% of generation comes from hydroelectric facilities
 - They are in a good spot for reaching clean energy goals set by Michigan
 - They have 2 new solar projects
 - They're NOT clear cutting trees, they're only using old mine land
 - They're looking into battery storage
 - Possibly placing battery storage at the combustion turbine site in Gladstone as they are likely to retire it in the next 5 years, currently only run it a couple hours a year (for maintenance), and the important electrical infrastructure already exists.
 - They know we live in a rural area and that comes with challenges of lower usage by customers and those customers being spread out. But they are committed to our communities and ensuring reliability and affordability.
- UPPCO's Renewable Energy Strategy
 - **Keep the lights on!** As owners and operators of the electric grid, they will always prioritize reliable energy over renewable energy. UPPCO is a critical infrastructure. *However, they don't believe reliability and renewability are mutually exclusive.*
 - They **prioritize energy independence** - 20% of power comes from hydrounits. They buy the rest from the market. Fuel mix is coming from Wisconsin and the UP. They want to own their own generation, which is good for our independence.
 - **Locally-sited generation** - they want to build these projects locally and intentionally put them in the right place to add to the tax base!
 - **Compliance with 2023 MI Energy Laws**
 - Laws aren't optional, we need to meet them
 - They believe in compliance as well as stewardship
 - **Competitive procurement** - they want competitive pricing for their projects and their customers
 - **Prefer former industrial and / or brownfield sites**
 - Sound procurement of blighted resources! Far better than taking trees out or using farmland.
 - **Optimal use of land resources**
 - **Drive economic benefit to communities** - we have assets in our community they've been here for over 100 years
 - **Drive economic benefit to all customers** through optimization of available tax credits

- There's a lot on whether tax credits will be around or for how long. We'll use them while we have them - maximizing those credits!
- 2023 Key MI Energy Laws (*from Public Act 235*)
 - Renewable Energy Standard
 - 50% by 2030, 60% by 2035
 - Clean Energy Standard
 - 80% by 2035, 100% by 2040
 - Statewide Energy Storage Target
 - 2,500 MW (UPPCO ~12.9 MW)
 - **Update:*
 - *With Groveland Mine and Republic, we're approaching 60%!*
 - *Gladstone, there is about 25 MW of opportunity*
- Project Intro
 - Technology: utility-scale solar
 - Size: 62.5 MW-ac
 - Location: Republic Township
 - Project site: former Republic Mine / "tailings area"
 - The tailings area is the original mine pit that has been backfilled with the following mine pit. It's been untouched for about 50 years.
 - It ranges from being 20 ft deep around the edges and about 45 ft at its deepest.
 - They'll be interconnecting at the substation that UPPCO owns with the American Transmission Company.
 - Interconnection: UPPCO's Perch Lake substation
 - Commercial operation date: 2027 target

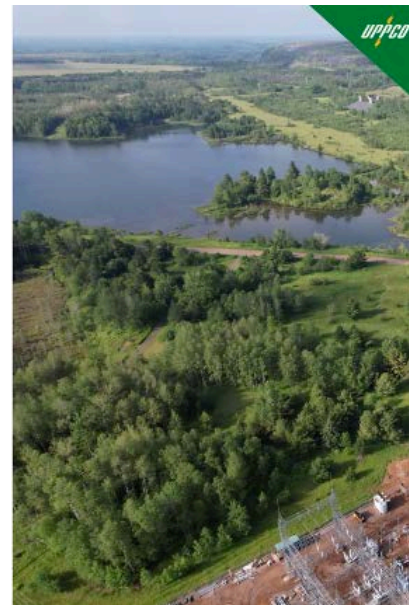


- **Blue lines:** the area that UPPCO has control of
- Lindberg owns the mine site land, which was purchased from Cleveland Cliffs in the late 1970s.

- The “Agriculture Circle” at the southwest corner of the image is the tailings area where solar panels will be placed.
 - 450 acres total
 - 350(ish) acres site control
 - 60 acres where generator lead will connect
 - Looks like this circle because Lindberg planted and irrigated grass here to keep the dust down.
- Solar arrays will be in the circle / tailings area. Generator leads will be run to the red box.
- They originally were planning to develop a site in Humboldt, which is a wooded area.



- Solar Panels
 - Assembled in Texas (which doesn't qualify for domestic product)
 - They will all be [bifacial](#)
 - Production is estimated at **62.5 MW** for the entire project
 - The panels are ordered and should be delivered to a storage facility in Wisconsin by the end of December
 - Tax credits: Because they fully purchased panels before Sept 2, they do meet the qualification for at least some of the federal tax credits.
 - 5% Safe Harbor
 - They do still have to demonstrate construction beginning before the end of December. They don't need it in service until the end of 2027, but they need to demonstrate the beginning of construction in 2025.
- Project Benefits
 - Increase in local tax revenue
 - ~\$61,250 / year x 20 years to Republic
 - ~\$1,225,000 total
 - Localized economic benefits from construction
 - Utilization of regionally local, skilled-trade labor
 - Increase in general economic activity in localized region
 - Increase in local incomes leads to an increase in local spending
 - Revitalization of a former industrial site
 - Optimization of applicable federal tax credits
 - Anticipated to lower the cost of the project by > \$50 million for all UPPCO customers
- Picture >>>
 - This was taken from the Perch Lake Substation, looking south. The ridgeline is visible (visible in photos above). The flat spot in the image is where they're putting the panels.
- Community Engagement
 - Republic Township has been fantastic to work with!
 - They have pursued it as a partnership with very open and transparent conversations from the beginning. At the End of August, they unanimously approved the application for solar tax exempt certificate.
 - Effectively in lieu of that, the statute says "UPPCO will pay X" and these dollars are what will go to Republic in the next 20 years.



- Constituents in Republic are excited by the tax base. A lot of the township says “yep, this is a good use of the land!”
- Status Update
 - Key Work Completed
 - Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)
 - Phase II (ESA)
 - Documentation of Due Care Compliance
 - Baseline Environmental Assessment (BEA)
 - Geotechnical Report
 - Racking / Foundation assessment by manufacturer
 - Panel manufacturer selected
 - Republic Township approval
 - Key Work Ahead
 - Continued value engineering and design work
 - Complete 10% design
 - Continue field work
 - Key procurement
 - Complete local construction permitting
 - Continued stakeholder engagement
 - Begin civil and foundations construction activities
- How does this align with CATF?
 - Exactly the type of project that CATF is supportive of and looking for!
 - UPPCO has selected the right site, engaged with the right stakeholders, and because of it, the UP is going to be better off!
 - They think this project really supports CATF’s mission!
 - Once they have “steel in the ground,” they’ll really be sharing more about this project!
 - “Brownfield to Brightfield”
 - Very locally built and developed project! This project has been premised on thoughtful consideration, open communication, and figuring things out as they go - smart decisions.
- **Questions from CATF membership:**
 - Made any change to the groundcover?
 - UPPCO is trying to disturb the ground as little as possible. They have good maintenance of the site right now! They’ll have sweeping measures as needed as they go, but they don’t want to have to.
 - They’re working with TriMedia for the long-term environmental effects which are almost nothing!
 - Solar Panels
 - Fixed tilt because of the conditions of freezing. This means decreased maintenance over time.
 - 4ft clearance off of ground so they can plow and keep access.
 - Do we have local talent?

- UPPCO will be bringing in experts, but they'll still try to employ as much local labor and subcontractors as possible.
 - Harvest Solar - out of downstate michigan
 - Michels Power - Wisconsin company
 - Apprentice statutes: they have to abide by this to qualify for tax credits. *Example - For every 4 workmen, you have to have 1 apprentice*
- Anticipated mitigations toward wildfire and grassland fire?
 - They are making sure to have an access road all around to create a buffer between area and wildlife with elevation change!
 - The tailing area is depressed from the surrounding area, so you'd lose the shrubgrass, some electrical equipment, but that's about it if there was a fire.
- Environmental remediation? Make use of brownfield pits available?
 - Found out about them after they did their environmental due diligence.
 - Reached out to EGLE to see if there's anything else they needed. And then they shared about the grants available... \$150 million project.

c. Committee Updates

a. Membership, Brad Neumann

- i. We've had lots of interest in the organization! The committee has been responding to those requests and even had a few new invitees at this meeting.
 - 1. Marquette County - Amy Stevens
 - 2. KBIC - Claire Christian and Sarah
- ii. There are a couple of other open invites currently out.
- iii. Initiated an application / interest form. This has been launched and tested by a prospective member.
- iv. For the last meeting of the quarter in December, if you have your 3 year term coming to an end, they'll check in to see if you want to continue being a member. This is optional! You can stick around or you can stop your service with CATF.

b. Outreach, Emily Leach

- i. 2025 is intended as an "inreach" year (CATF presentations and NCN) and taking the feedback from the 2049 Series as data to guide CATF partner organizations' work. As a reminder, the Learning Circle Summaries are on the CATF website: <https://marquettecountycatf.org/marquette-2049/>

1. Committee looking at reassessing how to do outreach as we move forward
- ii. Northern Climate Network (Chloe Ravenscraft):
 1. Upcoming Fall Climate at Noon Schedule (John X. Jamrich Hall, Room 1318)
 - **First presentation: September 5th - MI Healthy Climate Fellows**
 - **Friday, October 3rd, 12 pm - 1 pm**
 - i. Calista Rockwell from Michigan State University will be presenting on Mass Timber, a program promoting sustainable construction practices around the Great Lakes and beyond.
 - **Friday, November 7, 12 pm - 1 pm**
 - i. Dan Freeborn, Gradon Haehnel, and Jason Brynick with the Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO) will be sharing about the Republic Solar Project that is turning a former mine site into a solar farm.
- iii. We've been trying to find a backup presenter for the next meeting as our first option is unavailable.
 1. Brian working on it. Not solidified, but there is great interest
- iv. Scheduled next meeting: October 3 at 10 am, virtually. We'll look at the spreadsheet and do some reassessing.
- v. **Next Action:** Select a couple of key strategies from the excel sheet Anna and Isabelle worked on to pursue/ help to initiate collaboration with other organizations.

d. Member Updates

- a. **Anna Solberg (NMU)** - General Manager of Slabz Bar & Grill has offered to donate 10% of Monday night earnings to a fundraiser. Contact him for more details about how to have your nonprofit, organization, or cause be featured.
 - i. Tyler Codd, General Manager
906-373-7134 | tyler@slabzgrill.com
- b. **Jes Thompson (NMU)** -
 - i. [Michigan Infrastructure Office Technical Assistance Center \(MIO TAC\)](#) to teach our local community about [Elective Pay](#) (also known as Direct Pay) on **Wednesday, October 15, 2025**, from **2 pm to 4 pm** at the Marquette Township Community Room, located at 1000 Commerce Drive, Marquette, MI 49855.
 - ii. NMU has a new [sustainability demonstration area](#) being developed! We held 2 community input events on September 9 where we gathered information about how we should develop the space for students, faculty, staff, and community members. If you'd like to share your own thoughts, please fill out [this survey](#).

- iii. NMU is working on increasing our recycling and reducing waste that we send to the landfill. We've renegotiated our contract with Waste management so that they now tell us the weight of each load with photos! This will help us set meaningful targets on campus. We currently have a recycling rate of 32%.
 - iv. NMU has also started our baseline year for campus move-in. We switched the large roll-off dumpsters to be recycling only! We filled a total of 7 roll-offs with cardboard and plastic instead of trash, with volunteers helping students and parents learn what can and can't be recycled. Our hope is to recycle styrofoam next year - if you have any good facilities to send it, let us know!
 - v. The Office of Rural Prosperity invited Jes to their conference last week. She discussed the Marquette 2049 Learning Circles and there were many local governments interested in trying it at their home!
- c. **Kim LeTourneau (Zonta)** - Zonta is a nationally recognized service organization. They currently have a campaign called Climate Justice which empowers girls and women to have more of a seat at the table around environmental and family response issues. Kim is president until next June, then will take over the regional oversight of 9 different Zonta chapters. The Zonta in Marquette is 50 years old, but they haven't pursued partnership with CATF yet.
- d. **Brad Neumann (MSU Extension)**
 - i. MSU Extension has a program statewide that shares nutrition education, but unfortunately the program is losing their SNAP ED nutrition staff at the end of September.
 - ii. MSU has a project going with KBIC and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Continuation of Michigan Climate and Health Adaptation Program. Faculty and students in design and construction do design work at a site of community's choosing to make the site more resilient. KBIC applied for technical assistance on that, and they're working on the old BP gas station, intersection where 45 goes west toward Ontonogan. The tribe owns the site and is working to clean it up. Students and faculty working on the interface there. Maybe by winter/spring 2026, they'll have some designs for the site. Not much public outreach in the community yet, but it's coming up. Also working with Washtenaw County and Sterling Heights. We're learning things from all of the sites. They'll have reports coming out from all of this too!
- e. **Kristy Foye (MCCD)**
 - i. They have their big annual event coming up next friday - Agripaloosa! Over 300 Marquette County students are coming out. Close to 40 different presenters. Many partners!! Kids can learn about stewardship and climate adaptation. 15th year of doing Agripoloosa!
 - ii. The Conservation District is partnering with Rural KI and Marquette County on an urban community forestry grant through MDNR - 2 year

project on KI Sawyer sustainable food plantings and sustainable food forest.

f. Amy Stephens (Marquette County)

- i. There are at least 4 active grants funding projects in KI Sawyer right now! Trout Lake Park is currently being revised. 3 miles of trail going to be constructed along the Silver Lake Greenway.
- ii. They have an upcoming [clean up event at the KI Sawyer Fitness Trail](#) coming up October 18 at 12:00 pm.

g. Emily Leach (UPLC)

- i. Community Foundation - Their mission is connecting local resources to local needs. Last year they granted over \$3 million to local community members and nonprofits. Just had their annual event a few weeks back at NMU. The CFMC Catalyst Award went to Helen McCormick who started Room at the Inn. Bob Eslinger, board member, passed away last week from cancer.
- ii. UPLC - they preserve land and protect land through acquiring it and by conservation easements. Currently partnering with NTN, they're building trails in Negaunee Township (Vielmetti-Peters Reserve). And working with the American Bird Conservancy to do a big bird habitat. The Conservation Corps helped plant trees out there as well. Events coming up soon! Hoping to connect land and connect people to the land!

h. Brian Hummel (Emergency Manager, Marquette County)

- i. Working on community wildfire plan. About at the halfway point right now. Had some community input over the last few months. Reviewing input, and now reviewing action items to include in the plan. Finalizing before another round of public review and feedback
- ii. County hazard mitigation plan - outdated in January! We have not received official word of whether or not we have a grant to help with funding this. About \$15,000 to help with planning costs. Applied over 1 year ago. Working with other grant programs that are all in limbo. If we don't have updated plan, we can't apply for hazard mitigation projects.

i. Cathy Ruprecht (Sands Township) - Cathay works on sheltering efforts for domestic animals - trying to have disaster preparedness plans for resident's pets and animals. If you evacuate with your animals, we need to have a place where they can go. We don't currently have this. She's studied teams across the country, and there are volunteers that form community assistance plans for these pets, she's looking to structure this for us! IE - sending horses to Marquette County Fairgrounds and caring for them. She's also Red Cross member - they don't do pets. So you need to have animal welfare partners in communities that can step up. Looking into community grants available. She's open to suggestions and help!

j. Pri Burnham (LWV) - LWV's main mission is empowering voters and preserving democracy.

- i. Event: The state league is doing a Zoom presentation on [September 24 at 7:00](#), with guest speaker Douglas Jester. They'll be talking about how the UP can meet the state climate goals. Anyone can join. You have to register.
 - ii. Local environmental committee is ramping up its advocacy on the state and local level.
 - iii. They're doing lots of events with local speakers. On October 9, they'll meet at the library with Jen Hill to talk about electricity in the UP. And on October 14, they're getting a tour of the waste water treatment plant.
 - iv. Anyone can join the LWV!
- k. **Bob Kulishek (Chair of the County Health Department Board of Directors & Vice Chair of the Brownfield Authority in Marquette)** - both orgs are very compatible with CATF. Brownfield authority is instrumental in remediating buildings that have been deteriorating over the years. Working with Cliffs Dow, renovation of hospital, etc. Could be a good meeting topic!
- l. **Chloe Ravenscraft (SHINE, NMU student)** - She'll be sending out the Northern Climate Network newsletter soon, so if anyone has something they'd like to share, they can send it to Chloe. Almost 400 people on email list! Next week she's also heading to UMACS conference and she's sharing a poster about the NCN.
- m. **Matt Gross (Superior Watershed Partnership)** - Matt is an Energy Tech with the climate corps. They work to assess client homes to help them qualify for energy assistance programs. Provide personalized energy referrals, upgrades, etc. (like weatherization).
- n. **Alec Bush (Superior Watershed Partnership)** - Every Wednesday at the Climate Office, there is an e-waste collection event. They can take items like tvs, computers, printers, etc. and they get them to recycling centers. It takes place from noon-4, and anyone can bring their items! They just don't take appliances.
- o. **Claire Christen (KBIC)** - Claire works on energy efficiency, composting, solar, and more! She wants to chat about KBIC's newly adopted climate resiliency plan and climate mitigation plan. The documents were formalized about 1 year ago and they will be sent in the email with these minutes. The documents tabulate lists of actions that they've prioritized, but also provide explanations of what the tribe sees as firsthand effects of climate changes.
 - i. Also has project with MSU extension and energy auditing project with SWP
 - ii. Claire is based in Baraga, but they have some land and territory in Marquette
 - iii. Cera lives here!
- p. **Cera Shelafoe (KBIC)** - Cera does a lot of liaison between Lake Superior working group and the tribe. The lake is a big part of our climate. She also runs the tribal youth workers program which is a program that hires youth from 14-17 to show them what it's like to work with natural resources. They teach them regular skills like cooking and computer skills too! Lots of stuff!

- q. **Jane Fitkin (Citizens for a Safe and Clean Lake Superior)** - working to protect Lake Superior from environmental threats. This year they've been doing a lot around wetland protection through education and advocacy.
 - i. Superior on Tap presentations hosted over the last year.
 - 1. Next one Oct 2 @ 7pm at Ore Dock Brewery - about Isle Royale moose and wolf program
 - ii. Engaging with local governments in Choclay, Powell, and Marquette townships who are considering implementing policy protections for wetlands at local level
 - iii. Started vape recycling program, to dispose of e-cigarettes. Collection at Kenny's Corner Store. Collected over 300 lbs of vapes since last December
 - 1. Host volunteer events to tape over the ends, one next monday in the Heritage Room at the library - Tape the Vape at 2 -5pm next Monday
 - 2. Received impact grant to expand to 5 additional places across the county. Partnering with Wild Bills Tobacco, Circle K, and Firestation
 - 3. Expanding to accept both nicotine and cannabis based vapes
- r. **Krystle Baecker (SWP)**
 - i. Next week they're installing solar at 3 homes in the UP (2 in Ishpeming, 1 in Gladstone) working with Augustine solar from downstate.
 - ii. Eagle Mine Monitoring: Working on kemp analysis, which looks at groundwater springs that come up and turn into the Salmon Trout River and go into Lake Superior.
- s. **Darlene Walch (Supervisor, Sands Township)**
 - i. Hosted workshop around wildfire plan and large animal and pet rescue. They also have an e-waste and tire collection on the 3rd Saturday of each month from 10-2. This work is through a grant from EGLE and they did extend the grant for another 2 years.
 - ii. SWP did grant for tire collection this year. Aug 30 they had a semi filled with tires and then even brought in another trailer!
 - iii. Working to get the large solar project on Sands Plains. They're currently doing testing to see how deeply they need to put solar panels. Hoping to have the project in production by 2027.
 - iv. Marquette County Township Association is working with Marquette County Solid Waste Management Authority to increase the amount of recycling coming from the county to Recycle906. Many businesses are not recycling (lots of business cardboard going into landfill). Working on finding ways to encourage recycling.
- t. **Dave Stensaas (City of Marquette)** -
 - i. City adopted bi-annual strategic plan, approval of master plan recommendation for developing climate action plan. They're working on finding some capacity to work on this, and have applied to be a host site

for the next cohort of the MI Healthy Climate Fellowship. Even if they don't get this opportunity, they'll still be able to do the work in house.

e. Adjournment - 3:42 pm

f. Upcoming Meetings

a. December 4 @ 2:00 - 3:30