



Piscataway Conoy Tribe

Piscataway Conoy Tribal Council
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August 23, 2019

To: Jeff Thompson, Regional Chief
Nontidal Wetlands Division
Maryland Department of the Environment
1800 Washington Blvd
Baltimore, MD 21230
Via Electronic Mail to
Jeffery.thompson@maryland.gov

Ref: **A1 18-NT-0323/201861760-MD**
Solar 1, LLC, Joint Federal/State Application for the Alteration of Ant Floodplain.
Waterway, Tidal, or Nontidal Wetlands in Maryland.

Dear Mr. Thompson,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe to express our opposition to the propose Solar 1 (Origis Energy and Georgetown University) located at 4850 Shugart Valley Place, La Plata, MD 20646 in Charles County building a Solar farm.

It is an honor for me to represent the views of the Piscataway Conoy, whose spiritual values are derived from our Earth Mother and our Creator, who bestowed upon us a sacred obligation to **protect** and **preserve** the land, air and waters—not only for our descendants, but for all life forms. Our ancestors have considered the Potomac watershed area as a part of our traditional homelands for over 13,000 years. We were officially recognized by the state of Maryland in 2012 by Executive Order. This order affirmed the great contributions that the Piscataway Conoy people have made to the history and culture of Maryland and emphasized our connection to our ancestral lands, which include what is now Maryland, stating: “[m]any of [Maryland’s] rivers, streams, forests, trails, islands, towns, and landmarks bear important cultural ties to the American Indian people.” On our day of

state recognition, January 9th, 2012, Governor Martin O'Malley further addressed the importance of learning from and honoring the values of the Piscataway Conoy.

The Piscataway Conoy rely on the guiding principles communicated to us by our parents, elders and ancestors: our traditional indigenous knowledge. We speak for the **lands**, the **water** and the **air**. The Earth Mother is a living entity. The **Potomac, Patuxent** and the **Chesapeake** are three of her major arteries. The **Mattawoman, Nanjemoy(Ward Run), Occoquan, Piscataway, Port Tobacco, Pomonky, Wicomico, Mattaponi** and many others are the veins that complete her circulatory system to include all **Tributary Streams**. Our Earth Mother gives us Life! We, the Piscataway Conoy, must protect our Earth Mother in terms of perpetuating her many gifts for the future needs of the unborn, as opposed to the vast consumption based mentality of exploiting of our natural resources.

Our traditional indigenous knowledge emphasizes the respectful use of the land and waters. It is within our historical responsibility to protect and preserve for our descendants, as well as all life forms to include two-legged, four legged, the winged, and those that swim or crawl, the precious gift of clean water and clean air for our use today as well for countless generations in the future. Thriving populations of bald eagles, heron, beaver, river otter, deer, turtles and numerous aquatic species call this area home. Striped bass, white perch, channel catfish, blue crab, and others make this area particularly popular for recreational fishing. We honor our ancestors by continuing to speak for our relatives from the natural world that relies upon us to protect their habitat both today and into the future.

We, both individually and collectively, are responsible to ensure our actions and decisions support the Earth Mother and all of the creations whose daily existence depends upon her clean waters, clean air and natural landscape. We affirm our Indigenous view that the Earth is our true mother, who gives birth to us and maintains all life.

When Maryland recognized the Piscataway Conoy Tribe's sovereignty and historic presence in this State, it committed to respectful relations with our tribe. In its 2012 Report, the Maryland Governor's Commission on Indian Affairs defined state recognition as "the right to proclaim Native American heritage officially and preserve the history and culture of the American Indians in Maryland."

The integrity of Maryland's commitments to the Piscataway Conoy Tribe depends on robust and meaningful consultation on projects that threaten our ancestral lands. Meaningful tribal consultation includes several important elements, including early contact and communication, all parties being well informed about the scope of the project and potential impacts, site visits with agency and tribal officials, and mutual respect throughout the process. Unfortunately, the process that Origis Energy and Georgetown University implemented for the MD Solar 1 has fallen short of meaningful consultation.

To this point, Maryland's commitments to the Piscataway Conoy Tribe have not been honored with regard to Origis Energy and Georgetown University proposed MD Solar 1 Project. As

of today Origis Energy and Georgetown University have failed to use due diligence to identify the correct consulting parties and understand who we are. For example, Origis Energy and Georgetown University did not send consultation letters to our tribal leadership. Worse, the information in the Public Meetings was inadequate, or even misleading. The document that have been provided don't describe the environmental damage from a downstream perspective or disclose any potential impacts to the environment and our cultural heritage. Maps of the proposed project site, did not label or identify downstream Friendship Park, which contains sites and burial grounds that are sacred to our people. And has Origis Energy and Georgetown University failed to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement for this project.

We request that Maryland and Federal authorities ensure that Origis Energy and Georgetown University prepares a full Environmental Impact Statement and fully and meaningfully consults our tribal leadership before making any plans to build this Solar Farm in this region.

This sacred land, upon which we walk today, is the same land our ancestors walked upon, cared for, and where they now rest and hopefully will rest into perpetuity. We, the living Piscataway Conoy, and our future descendants honor our ancestors by striving to protect their habitat and ours, both today and into the future. Construction of the MD Solar 1 project would be a devastating attack on our Earth Mother and all of the creations whose daily existence depend upon her clean waters, clean air and natural landscape.

In a letter from MD DNR dated July 17, 2017 from Ms. Lori A. Byrne to Ms. Jessica A Antos that the Wildlife and Heritage Service has determined from the remote analysis that the forest area of the MD Solar 1 project is habitat in which Interior dwelling Birds reside. This population of many bird species which depends on this type of forest habitat are declining in the great State of Maryland and thus allowing this project to move forward will be attack on our thriving population of the winged ones.

In 2013, Preservation Maryland (PM) placed 12 indigenous landscapes in six Maryland counties on its Maryland Endangered list, including the Nanjemoy and Mattawoman watersheds. While Preservation Maryland's definition of the Indigenous landscape was more general than the concept used in their report, nonetheless recognized they are as deserving of consideration in the face of urban and suburban development. By creating this MD Solar 1 project the Nanjemoy has now come under attack and once removed will never return.

In 2015, the National Park Service commissioned a survey of The Nanjemoy and Mattawomen Creeks Watershed with St. Mary's College of Maryland, The Piscataway Conoy, and other stakeholders. It was disclose how the Nanjemoy Creek drainage contains fragile habitats and is the site of the largest great blue heron rookery on the East Coast north of Florida. It was also determined that the Nanjemoy with its sister the Mattawoman contain some of the most ecologically important land in the Potomac valley.

In the recent "A Social & Economic Assessment of the Shugart Solar Project" does not address the Vegetation Management Plan whereas in 14(f) a discussion of Herbicides and Pesticides

is any better than the “Avoided Pollutant in section 3: Carbon Offset Impacts”. As it is well known the use of Herbicides and Pesticides pose a great danger to humans. To the Fish and the wildlife from which we gather the danger of consuming these resources only to contract illness from would inevitable and devastating.

To destroy the natural world for the alleged benefit comes with a cost. Where are the alternative proposed sites? Southern Maryland has plenty of old surface gravel mining location that are no longer in use which would require no devastation impact on our Natural resources.

CONCLUSION

We have a right to a consultation process in which we are fully informed about any project that may impact our ancestral homeland and are given a chance to voice our opposition to the harmful exploitation of resources. **No matter where the MD Solar 1 is located, there will be harm to the environment in the form of toxic, polluted water, and major damage to wildlife and wetlands. While we applauded Origis Energy and Georgetown University attempt to develop and obtain renewable energy resources by reducing its reliance on fossil fuel it must do so without MAJOR consequences to the Natural world.** Construction of the MD Solar 1 would manifest a total and utter disrespect for health and life, with no proven benefits to Maryland citizens.

“We speak for the land, the air and the water.”

Sincerely,

Francis Gray
Piscataway Conoy Tribal Chair
piscatawayconoycouncil@gmail.com