



## Neighbors worry about flooding from Nestlewood Solar: 'We're going to lose our property because of this'

By: Paula Christian

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TATE TOWNSHIP, Ohio — Many neighbors of the Nestlewood Solar Facility near Hammersville in Clermont County have complained about flooding and standing water after heavy rains this week.

The controversial project has divided this farming community. Many residents leased their land to Texas-based Vesper Energy for an 80-megawatt solar facility where corn and soybeans were once farmed on more than 600 acres on the Clermont and Brown county lines.

Outrage over the project led Tate Township trustees to ban future large-scale solar projects.

Then Clermont County Commissioners approved a ban of large solar and wind farms in seven townships last summer after enraged residents called the Nestlewood project almost 700 acres of pure hell.

The solar issue launched political activism in the rural township, and propelled farmer and tree service owner, Rusty Durbin, to run for trustee and win last November on an anti-large-scale solar platform.

Tate Township Trustee Rusty Durbin hopes Vesper Energy fixes the roads, ditches, culverts and neighboring property this spring.

Now neighbors say an especially wet week is making them wonder if their land will suffer long-term damage from the solar project. They say the impact of Nestlewood's construction has re-routed water and turned small creeks into large waterways, flooding roads, ditches, backyards and basements when it rains.

"We're going to lose our property because of all this," said Paul Daugherty, who lives next to a new electrical substation and switch yard for Nestlewood. "We went through months of construction with much lime and rock brought in, and much dirt removed and now ... they leave us with ponds everywhere."

Tate Township resident Paul Daugherty complains about flooding on his land from the Nestlewood solar project and substation on Jan. 9, 2024.

WCPO spoke to many longtime residents who said they never had standing water in their yards until crews broke ground on Nestlewood nearly two years ago.

Michelle Clement, who lives next to Daugherty and the new substation, said parts of her cow pasture were flooded this week. She also worries about deep ditches along Leonard Road that were caused by heavy equipment brought in for the solar project. Trucks were forced to pull off the one-lane road, creating deep ruts that fill up with water when it rains. In the summer, they become ponds for mosquitoes and are filled with weeds.

Residents near the Nestlewood solar project in Tate Township complained about flooding after heavy rains on Jan. 9, 2024.

"I can't push mow it anymore, so I look at weeds all year," Clement said.

Charles Day said his backyard repeatedly floods, and this week his creek was running at its banks and very muddy. He has lived on Oak Corner Road for 15 years, and prior his in-laws owned the property since 1993, and they never had any water issues until Nestlewood. He contacted county and state officials, and even the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, but said no one has helped him.

"I'm very upset because we're not being treated as citizens of the United States in my opinion. We're being treated like nobody because nobody wants to fix it."

Durbin has walked the flooded backyards of township residents, and seen smashed culvert pipes, water-filled ditches and destroyed roads.

"I know part of their contract is they're going to come back and fix everything when they get done. I hope that it's true and they do that," Durbin said.

Clermont County's first largescale solar project is Nestlewood being built in Tate Township.

If residents have concerns, Nestlewood has established a complaint resolution process, according to documents on the siting board's website.

## Downhill from a solar garden: Homeowner blames new site for spring flood



**Nora G. Hertel**

St. Cloud Times June 25, 2019

HAVEN TOWNSHIP — Greg Rakotz's neighbor warned him to keep an eye on the water rising in his backyard on March 21.

The next morning he woke up early and started pumping what had become a pond in the back corner of his yard, Rakotz recounted Wednesday to the St. Cloud Times.

He blames a new solar garden development two plots away, behind his home, as the source of accelerated snowmelt that flooded his yard.

Developers of the site say the winter was unusually wet and Rakotz's land low-lying. Plus they plan to grow a mix of meadow plants that could help the land hold even more water in the future.

"It's not my intention to bad-mouth them. We just had a bad experience," Rakotz said. "This was a pretty bad fiasco for us."

Water came right up to the edge of the walk-out basement of the Haven township home and took three days to clear. Rakotz estimates it was 640,000 gallons of water and it cost his family \$15,000 to pump it away and repair their contaminated well.

Rakotz, a union equipment operator, moved with his family from St. Joseph to their new home southeast of St. Cloud in December. His oldest son Derek, 11, practiced hockey in the garage on Wednesday.

The tips of new solar panels are visible above a fence, past a field and through trees behind Rakotz's backyard.

His house is on Sherburne County Road 8, where numerous solar gardens have popped up, including some currently under construction.

Stearns County had the second highest number of community solar gardens as of December 2018, with Sherburne and Wright counties tied for fourth place, according to a map by [VoteSolar.org](http://VoteSolar.org) with data from the [Minnesota Department of Commerce and the University of Minnesota](#).

There were 12 community solar projects in Stearns and nine in Sherburne at the end of last year, according to that data.

The solar site behind Rakotz's home is still under construction. It's being developed by NextEra Energy Resources with Hunt Electric Corporation doing the electrical installation, said Hunt Electric CEO/President John Axelson.

Crews started working on the site again in March; work was underway last year.

Rakotz said crews were moving snow and exposing earth, which hastened the melt that flowed downhill flooding his yard and almost his home. The water rose four feet above the well cap in his backyard.

He checked with a neighbor and the previous homeowner who assured him the yard had not flooded like that in at least the last 15 years, he said.

If the problem's not fixed, Rakotz worries it could depreciate the value of the property.

Rakotz hired an engineer to look at the site, he said. "Those solar panels are so big, they're going to direct water into a channel."

He sought help from the developers, but they kept their hands in their pockets, he said. "They didn't want to be involved or be liable."

In roughly 10 years working on solar sites Axelson has never heard of water issues like this, he said Friday. "It's not a common experience."

## Plainville residents plagued by flooding blame neighboring solar project

by LEANNA FAULK, NBC 10 NEWS

Mon, January 29th 2024 at 9:34 PM **Updated** Tue, January 30th 2024 at 4:05 PM

PLAINVILLE, Mass. — Residents of Plainville, Massachusetts, say they are stressed over a solar project that they said has left their properties flooded.

Homeowners on Berry and Spring streets told NBC 10 News that it wasn't a problem until crews broke ground up the hill from them.

Last summer, the lot on the hill was cleared for a solar farm, but with all the trees gone, the water runs down the hill and right into resident's homes.

"It was like gushing in. Like you could hear like woosh. I was upstairs, like, what is that noise?" said resident Jennifer Coes. "It was killing the sump pump. He had to replace the sump pump like twice because of this craziness."

Coes said she's rented the home since 2017, but this was the first time she's needed rain boots to walk through her basement.

Last summer, Madison Energy and Next Grid cleared roughly 30 acres of trees to make way for the panels.

Residents said the flooding has been persistent ever since.

"They need to take appropriate measures to keep the water on their property. No overflow on their property should affect the neighbors of the solar farm," said another resident.

The company sent a statement to NBC 10 News on Tuesday:

"This flooding is unacceptable. Our team is currently on site and actively developing a plan to mitigate this issue. We are committed to working collaboratively with local officials and stakeholders to find and urgently implement mitigation strategies. Throughout the project's development and construction phases, we have been actively engaging with the community, and we will continue to do so, including participating in the town's next planning committee hearing on February 5," said Adam Christie, MEI Director of Civil Engineering.

Madison Energy has until Feb. 1 to come up with a solution for residents and bring it to the Plainville town planning board, according to the town administrator.

Coes has 30 days to find a new place to live after her landlord chose not to renew her lease.

She said he's no longer interested in the upkeep after weeks of flooding.

"I'm calling him over here constantly to deal with this and he's finally given up. It's costing him too much, probably not worth it," said Coes.

*Updated to include statement from Madison Energy.*

## Sharon solar work shuts down farm well

2/9/2024

By Patsy Nicosia

Now, it's not just roads the NextEra solar project in the Town of Sharon is destroying. It's wells too.

So much for the state's Right to Farm Law, said Stuart Salisbury, whose family saw well water to their Sakon Road dairy barn nearly disappear almost overnight at the end of January.

There's barely enough to water the cows in the morning, Mr. Salisbury said; by evening, there's none at all, forcing them to switch over to a pond for both the milking barn and the milk house.

Though that's the most dramatic impact from the "pounding" that's going on just across the road as crews install the solar panels—"No water, no milk," Mr. Salisbury said—it's not the only one.

Excess water runoff is flooding their farm fields, and because Sakon Road is marked "closed" at their driveway, they're unable to get to land they're paying to rent to spread manure, Mr. Salisbury said.

Additionally, he said, they've seen workers dumping five gallon containers of used diesel on the ground—something they worry will contaminate the water they do have.

Other farmers on Parsons Road have filed similar complaints with the New York State Public Service Commission in connection with the project: loss of water and unable to access the road to cut crops or spread manure.

Mr. Salisbury said he also reached out to DEC with his concerns.

They sent him to the PSC, he said, where he was told that unless the work was being done within 100 feet of the well—it's about 300 feet away, he said—there's nothing they can do.

"Twenty-five years with no problem with our well and now there's a problem and they tell me it's not related?" he said.

Mr. Salisbury also reached out to Assemblyman Chris Tague, who shares his concern.

"Our main concern is to take care of the Salisburys so they can continue farming," he said.

"This is exactly what I warned about when Governor Cuomo took away home rule. We're taking vast amounts of valuable farmland out of production and tying the hands of our farmers and our local communities."

Monday, Assemblyman Tague's office made phone calls to DEC and Ag & Markets; both promised phone calls to the Salisburys.

"They know we're keeping an eye on this," said his Chief of Staff, Lois Goblet.

Sakon Road is the other end of Beech Road, where Highway Superintendent Bill Barbic Jr. continues to wage war against runoff and other issues caused by excavation—and now re-excavation: partially-collapsed cross-culverts, pooling water because of blocked drainage, missing, required, erosion and sediment controls, and high-voltage lines buried in the middle of Beech in conduits without the appropriate backfill.

"It's all mis-management," Mr. Barbic said. "They're not following the state's own protocol—things I have to do. That line down the middle of the road? Legally, I can't even maintain it anymore now."

Mr. Barbic's also fielded complaints from Beech Road neighbors over traffic and noise and Sunday construction—and a phone line ripped off a home.

He estimates it would take "millions" to repair the damage to the road and properties and continues to document it with what's become hundreds of photos.

"It just doesn't stop," said Sharon Supervisor Sandy Manko. "The state doesn't appear to be doing anything and they don't react or pay attention to anything."

"It's like anything goes. It's like the days of shutting down a project... is gone. NextEra can do anything they want and they know it."