

MINNESOTA
North Star Chapter
 The leading grassroots voice to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment.

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3 AUG
2011

Minneapolis Clean Energy Tour

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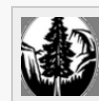
On Saturday, July 30, Sierra Club North Star Chapter hosted their second Clean Energy Tour in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Our group of about 50 business representatives, activists, and local residents attended the afternoon tour of three sustainably progressive projects.

The afternoon began at the [St. Paul Regional Labor Federation](#), where President Bobby Kasper discussed the importance of green jobs and his vision for clean energy economy. Elizabeth Glidden was also invited from the Minneapolis City Council to say a few words about clean energy and moving toward sustainable fuels through political action.



From there, we loaded the tour bus and sped off to our first stop, [District Energy](#) in St. Paul. From initially using steam in 1983 to more modern temperature-based water energy, representatives from District Energy explained the 501c3 nonprofit's progression and future 10-year goal of 100% renewable energy (currently being 60-70% renewable).

After the opening history lesson, District Energy showed tour members the main act, their solar thermal project. As the largest one of its kind in the Upper Midwest, it is the first in the country to connect into the district energy system.



Sierra Club North Star Chapter's Postero.us

The Sierra Club's members are 1.3 million of your friends and neighbors. Inspired by nature, we work together to protect our communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.

The Sierra Club North Star Chapter is the leading grassroots voice to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment.

Specifically, the Sierra Club North Star Chapter advances:

Volunteer Leadership

Some organizations have volunteers. The Sierra Club North Star Chapter is volunteers. Our members pick our legislative priorities, conduct the work, and make real change for Minnesota's environment.

Environmental Advocacy

Our members lead work on a breadth of issues all across Minnesota to protect our state's natural places and address our most pressing environmental challenges.

Outdoor Exploration

Minnesota has a rich natural environment. Our award-winning outings connect members to each other and to Minnesota's natural places, building a legacy of connection to our land.

We invite you to join us in achieving our goals.



Different from electric photovoltaic (PV) modules, the solar thermal panel system heats water-filled tubes to generate energy. Since March, 2011, the system has run at 80% efficiency with the Minnesota sun, compared to about 10-20% efficiency of PV panels as explained by District Energy representatives.

Visiting the solar-paneled roof was an exciting opportunity for our group, as Sierra Club volunteer Jason Bender proudly expressed, "It's a glimpse into the energy technology of the future."

Our next location involved research around clean energy at the [St. Anthony Falls Laboratory](#) in Minneapolis, sponsored by the University of Minnesota (UMN). Since 1938, the St. Anthony Falls has transitioned from working against nature to working with nature. Thus, many of the lab's research projects involve overcoming challenges associated with clean energy and working with nature.

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Touring the lab, research students introduced our group to many projects including the analysis of natural river delta evolution, incorporating effects of waves or tides on a scaled-down replica, and the analysis of wind turbines through their scaled-down, man-made wind tunnel, which uses hurricane force winds to monitor efficiency. Through this wind tunnel, they can experiment with turbine placement and spacing, blade speed, and blade coating to maximize effectiveness and energy output.

Fun Fact: A motionless wind turbine does not indicate malfunction. Wind energy involves experimental components, which determine the blades' stillness or movement.

Following the lab tour, clean energy presentations were given by Carla Carlson of [UMore Park](#), Mark Ahlstrom of [Windlogics](#), and Shane Stennes with the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Sustainability Office who explained how the UMN Twin Cities campus hopes to be "Carbon Neutral by 2050."

Finally, at a solar panel installation in St. Paul, the tour ended with a presentation from [tenKsolar](#) about their innovative solar panels manufactured in Bloomington and installed at that location by [Sundial Solar](#). Their modules have multiple connections for energy output, allowing continual operation even when portions are blocked from the sun. Thus, the panels require less maintenance and cleaning and higher efficiency, especially in the cold, snowy months.

After the busy, four-hour fun, our group seemed to beam with excitement and a new-found zeal for sustainable, renewable, clean energy sources and solutions. We encourage those interested to [get involved](#) and help our nation move beyond coal!

With the overwhelming interest and positive responses we received, we may be looking to conduct another Clean Energy Tour for those unable to attend last Saturday. So, stay updated by signing up on our email list or by following our blog, [Facebook page](#), or [Twitter account](#).

Thanks to all those who participated, presented, or contributed!

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