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## **For immediate release**

### **Resilience Hub at Minnesota Tribal School Goes Live Despite Federal Funding Cuts to Climate Change Projects**

*New solar and battery installation on White Earth Reservation promises backup power and lower energy bills for one of America's most energy-burdened communities*

PINE POINT, Minn. — In Minnesota's north woods, where winter power outages can turn deadly, and some families must choose between heating their homes and buying groceries, a tribal school has flipped the switch on a solar and battery system five years in the making.

The Pine Point Resilience Hub is now live, based at a K-8 school and gathering center for elders on the White Earth Reservation: a 500-kilowatt solar array paired with a 2.76 megawatt-hour battery capable of powering the building through a full blackout and, under optimal conditions, recharging from the sun. A ribbon-cutting is planned for May 4th.

The project navigated precarious terrain to arrive at this moment. It was launched under the Inflation Reduction Act. It survived a turbulent transition as the current administration clawed back clean energy grants, dismantled equity programs, and moved to eliminate tax credits for clean energy. Billions of dollars awarded to support community-based projects were terminated by the White House. This one made it through — barely.

"We have stayed true to our values," said Sandra Kwak, CEO and founder of 10Power, the developer. "This project thankfully prevailed, but many others were canceled. Now, we're working to help as many as possible qualify for tax credits before they end. We are committed to finding other sources of funding for projects that are imperative for energy resiliency."

The stakes in Pine Point are not abstract. The community sits in the 98th percentile nationally for energy burden — the share of household income spent on electricity. Across the United States, Native Americans face the highest energy poverty of any demographic group; 14 percent of reservation homes lack electricity entirely, and nearly half lack reliable clean water or adequate sanitation.

The school itself was built as an all-electric facility with ground-source heat pumps, generating steep energy costs. The new system was projected to save the school \$1.15 million over 25 years. That figure has since been revised downward by roughly \$324,000 after the local utility, Itasca Mantrap, announced a rate increase that coincided with the resilience hub going live.

Financing the installation required assembling a patchwork of sources: the Department of Energy, Minnesota's Solar for Schools program, the Tribal Solar Accelerator Fund, the Verizon Climate Resilience Prize, the Hammond Climate Solutions Foundation, and a private bridge loan. The school paid nothing out of pocket. The White Earth Tribe will own the system long-term. A joint venture was created between 10Power and 8th Fire Solar, a native-led community organization, to handle operations and maintenance funded through the school's energy savings. The venture is currently recruiting a community member to train as a solar and battery technician.

The battery — American-made lithium iron phosphate, sourced from Texas-based ELM MicroGrid — is designed to carry the school through a full day of backup power during a blackout. The solar panels were manufactured at Heliene's plant in Mountain Iron, Minnesota, less than a hundred miles from where they're now installed. A native-owned local firm, Gordon Construction, handled site work.

For the White Earth Tribe, the project is about energy sovereignty.

"Harnessing this gift from the sun gives us power and is in line with the ways of the earth and traditional stewardship values," said Laura Erickson, Pine Point's District Representative to the White Earth Tribal Council.

White Earth is among dozens of tribal nations now establishing Tribal Utility Commissions and writing their own utility codes. Nathan Matthews, director of the White Earth Tribal Utility Commission, said: "Policies like net metering are essential not just for economics but for protecting tribal ratepayers and advancing energy sovereignty."

He also noted an unresolved tension: the system will overproduce electricity in summer, when school is out, and grid power is most expensive. Matthews is calling on Itasca Mantrap and its wholesale provider, Great River Energy, to develop battery participation programs that would let installations like Pine Point's feed clean power back to the grid during peak periods — potentially lowering costs for everyone.

Winona LaDuke, the indigenous activist, author, and founder of 8th Fire Solar, said the Resilience Hub is a foothold, not a finish line. "This is just the beginning — that's why it's called Waabizii 1. Next up is getting solar on every home that wants it."

Students at the Pine Point School will learn about the installation next to their playground through a new solar curriculum that weaves together energy science, climate resilience, and Ojibwe language instruction — a deliberate effort to root the technology in Indigenous knowledge and ensure the next generation understands both how the system works and how it supports healthy natural systems.

The May 4th ribbon cutting ceremony's theme is "May the Fourth Be With You," and festivities will include a screening of Star Wars dubbed in Ojibwe. To attend the May 4th ribbon-cutting, RSVP at [luma.com/fqyqp34w](https://luma.com/fqyqp34w).

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### **About 10Power**

**10Power** is a mixed-race, woman-owned, social impact organization, founded in 2015, that collaborates directly with underserved communities who lack equitable access to electricity to deploy renewable energy projects for climate justice, with a focus on local workforce development for a green economy with a gender equity lens. 10Power is supporting tax exempt entities including tribes, schools and non-profits to qualify renewable energy projects for cash rebates through Investment Tax Credits before the deadline of July 4, 2026.

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### **About 8th Fire Solar**

**8th Fire Solar** was launched in 2017 in the village of Pine Point as a community development initiative aimed at restoring a regionally integrated Anishinaabe economy focused on food, energy, and value-added production. A program of 8th Fire Solar manufactures solar thermal collectors as part of a local workforce development program, providing training on manufacturing and installation, reducing energy bills and carbon emissions.

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