



Wind Energy and Wildlife

Wind Industry Takes Proactive Approach

Expanding the use of wind power improves environmental conditions for wildlife because wind power has none of the harmful emissions, water use, mining, drilling and hazardous waste of other energy sources. Even so, AWEA and the wind power industry are committed to reducing the environmental impacts of wind projects.

Wildlife collisions and habitat effects are the primary impacts associated with wind projects. The wind industry approaches wildlife issues proactively and is confident that ways can be found for wind power and wildlife to coexist successfully.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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Wind farms and wildlife

Wind is a 100% pure, clean energy source, and one of the most compatible with wildlife. However, because wind energy projects are often located in rural, unpopulated areas of the United States where wildlife is also found, some impact is unavoidable.

The wind industry has taken a systematic approach to identify potential impacts on birds, bats and other wildlife, and is engaged in initiatives aimed at reducing, if not eliminating, those impacts. These efforts are described below.

New guidelines for wind power projects

Beginning in 2007, the wind industry collaborated with environmental groups, state wildlife agencies, and the federal government on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Wind Turbine Guidelines Federal Advisory Committee. The committee drafted detailed wind project siting guidelines aimed at minimizing impacts on wildlife and habitats and providing a development framework for the wind industry. FWS is currently proposing to set the committee's recommendations aside and impose new guidelines that are not based on sound science. The wind industry is seeking to restore the committee consensus.

Bats and Wind Energy Cooperative

In 2003, studies at a project in West Virginia discovered bat kills in numbers larger than previously known. Since then, fatalities have been documented at higher than expected rates at other locations. More recently, concerns have been raised about the impact of wind projects on the Indiana bat, an endangered species found in a wide area of the central Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.

The Bats and Wind Energy Cooperative (BWEC) was formed in 2003 by Bat Conservation International (BCI), the US Fish and Wildlife Service, AWEA, and the Energy Department's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). BWEC has researched the issue of bat fatalities at wind energy projects and is actively investigating several promising techniques that can be used to reduce them, such as operational changes and deterrent devices. The wind industry is also helping to fund research into White-Nose Syndrome, a disease that has devastated cave-dwelling bats in the Northeast.



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Birds and wind turbines

While birds do collide with wind turbines at some sites, modern wind power plants are collectively far less harmful to birds than are radio towers, tall buildings, airplanes, vehicles and numerous other manmade objects. The National Academy of Sciences estimated in 2006 that wind power is responsible for less than 0.003% (3 of every 100,000) of bird deaths caused by humans and pets.

American Wind Wildlife Institute

The American Wind Wildlife Institute (AWWI) was founded in December 2007 by 20 top science-based conservation and environmental groups and wind companies. AWWI's mission is to facilitate timely and responsible development of wind power while protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat. It does this through research, mapping, mitigation, and public education on best practices in wind project siting and wildlife habitat protection. AWEA is a strong supporter of the Institute and AWEA and several member companies were instrumental in its founding.

National Wind Coordinating Collaborative

The Altamont Pass in northern California was one of the first wind projects installed and remains the only wind development area in the U.S. that experiences significant bird deaths, specifically raptors or birds of prey. In 1994, shortly after raptor deaths in the Altamont Pass became a general concern, the wind energy industry joined with government officials, environmental groups, and utilities to form the National Wind Coordinating Collaborative (NWCC), aimed at addressing the avian issue as well as others affecting the industry's future. NWCC has sponsored meetings and academic papers to further understanding of wind energy's wildlife impacts, and provides updates to the environmental community about the latest wind-related research, along with events related to the biological significance of wind's impacts. It also has sponsored a wind project permitting handbook. More information is available at <http://www.nationalwind.org>.

Sage Grouse

Various types of development in the Western U.S. are threatening the sage grouse, but so far no evidence has shown that wind projects pose a specific threat. In 2010, Interior Secretary Salazar said the bird deserves to be added to the federal list of threatened and endangered species. Due to a backlog of imperiled species, he took no action, leaving regulation to the states.

Whooping Crane

In 2009, the Interior Department awarded over \$1 million to Oklahoma to help the wind industry develop a regional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to protect the migration route of the whooping crane and the habitat of the lesser prairie chicken. The department said this habitat conservation plan is the first to take note of alternative energy and climate change issues while also protecting imperiled species. The wind industry is also providing funds for the project, believing that a habitat plan will help companies obtain permits for projects in the Central Plains, while still protecting the two species. The whooping crane is listed as endangered and the lesser prairie chicken is being considered for protection.