



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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Position on Wind Power Development

The Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society supports development of renewable resources to provide energy in our region, the state, and beyond. Continued dependence on fossil fuels and nuclear power carries with it serious environmental consequences including air and water pollution, toxic waste and the threat of global warming. These impacts in turn negatively affect wildlife--including birds--through degradation and alteration of habitat, and the direct effects of pollution on health and reproduction.

Wind energy shows great promise as a renewable resource, and provides an opportunity to meet at least a portion of our energy requirements locally. Wind power is non-polluting, is essentially free beyond initial equipment costs and maintenance, and can be utilized immediately in the existing energy infrastructure.

However, all methods of energy production, even those using renewable resources, do have some environmental impacts. Wind power is no exception. Modern wind turbines are large structures that may visually disrupt the existing landscape. The turbines also create moderate sound while operating. Habitat may be disturbed by the towers and related facilities.

Of greatest concern to DOAS is the potential of impacts to birds, and bats, from wind turbine blades and towers, and, significant degradation or fragmentation of habitats. Some wind farms, especially one located in a major hawk and eagle winter foraging area, have caused significant mortality from collisions with blades, towers and guy wires. However, more modern turbine designs with slower rotating blades, monopole towers, and minimal lighting have reduced dangers to birds. Even though little mortality has been found at some existing sites, surveys assessing these impacts have been limited. Also, few projects have been built in areas where raptors and other species are known to concentrate during migration and seasonally. Ridges and shorelines, which are closely followed by some species during migration, are often good areas for wind power development. These areas are increasingly being considered for such development.

In addition, knowledge of specific bird migration routes and seasonal concentration areas is very limited. Without site-specific surveys, it is impossible to assess the risk to birds from wind turbines.

A significant portion of the eastern population of Golden Eagle migrates through Delaware and Otsego Counties. The Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch in Davenport records large numbers of Golden Eagles each fall. This New York State endangered species has also been described by a researcher as being the raptor species at “the highest risk” for impacts from wind projects. Recent surveys by our organization have documented significant winter populations of Bald and Golden Eagles in this region.

Thousands of Red-tailed Hawks also pass through our area annually. Among raptors, this species is predicted to suffer “the most collisions” from wind turbines. Besides the observations at Franklin Mountain, little else is known about how Golden Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks travel through the area. With up to 60,000 wind turbines expected to be built in the United States in coming years, it is important that wind farms be sited away from areas of bird concentrations or movements.

Our organization urges that for these projects thorough assessments on the impacts to bats and birds be prepared and reviewed prior to approval by the appropriate agencies, and, that these assessments include multi-year fall and spring surveys of bird migration in the vicinity of proposed wind power sites. Reviews should also utilize the NY State Environmental Quality Review Act to evaluate the cumulative impacts of multiple wind projects in the region.

Since the development of wind farms is increasing, and knowledge of their effects on flying species is limited, DOAS also supports additional studies, to be conducted after the projects are operational, to determine actual impacts to bats and birds. Such studies would also benefit the wind industry by providing information on siting projects to avoid conflicts with birds. The value of these post-construction mortality studies is dependent upon them being made available to the public. In addition, we urge that any project's approval be contingent on the developer and operator following the most current version of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's recommendations for reducing risk and avoiding bird collisions with turbines.

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