

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society
POSITION ON WIND POWER DEVELOPMENT

The Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) supports the development of renewable resources to provide cleaner energy to our region, state and country. The negative health affects of fossil fuels and nuclear energy on both humans and wildlife are well documented. Our dependence on these toxic substances continues to negatively impact our environment, including but not limited to rapidly increasing: air pollution, water pollution and global warming. Wildlife is additionally impacted by degradation and/or loss of habitat.

Wind energy shows great promise as a renewable resource. It provides an opportunity to meet a portion of our energy requirements in an environmentally responsible manner. Other than initial equipment costs and maintenance, wind power is essentially free, is non-polluting, and, in most applications, can be utilized immediately in the existing energy infrastructure.

However, all methods of energy production, even those using renewable resources, have an impact on the environment. Wind power is no exception. Modern wind turbines are large structures that may visually disrupt the existing landscape, and turbines also create moderate noise while operating. Construction of towers and related facilities may disturb wildlife habitat.

SAAS is particularly concerned about the potential for a serious impact on bird and bat populations - both from direct strikes with towers or rotating blades and from degradation or fragmentation of habitat. The ridges and shorelines that many migratory species follow are also often good sites for wind power development. Yet, in many cases, knowledge of specific bird migration routes and concentration areas is very limited. *Without site specific surveys, it is impossible to assess the risk to birds from wind turbines.*

Improperly sited wind farms (situated in major hawk and eagle winter foraging areas) have caused significant mortality from collisions with blades, towers and guy wires. Modern wind turbine designs with slower rotating blades, monopole towers, and minimal lighting have reduced some of the dangers to birds; however, even though little evidence of mortality may have been found at some existing sites, it must be noted that post-construction surveys assessing the impact on animal species have been limited.

A significant portion of the eastern population of Golden Eagle migrates through New York State. This New York State endangered species has been described by one researcher as being the raptor species at “the highest risk” for impacts from wind projects. Preliminary tracking of these birds indicates that they migrate through the Adirondacks. Research is currently being conducted by the National Aviary to determine specific migration routes; when available, this data will be invaluable for use in siting wind energy projects.

As of this writing, New York State derives 18% of its energy from renewable sources, with a commitment to raise that level to 25% by 2013. Wind energy will be utilized to meet that goal. There are currently five operating wind farms in New York state, with six more under construction, and 30 in the planning stages. Given this level of growth, it is imperative that wind farms be sited away from areas of either bird or bat concentrations or areas utilized seasonally by either group.

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society strongly recommends that, prior to approval by appropriate agencies, thorough assessment of the impacts to birds and bats be prepared for every proposed wind energy project. These assessments should include multi-year fall and spring surveys of bird migration in the vicinity of proposed wind power sites, and research to determine use of the area by breeding bird species at other times. Additionally, studies to determine use of the site area by bats in any season should be required. The use of radar/sonar for any studies involving bats or migrating bird species should be mandatory. Reviews should

also utilize the NY State Environmental Quality Review Act to evaluate the cumulative impacts of multiple wind projects in the region.

Development of wind farms is increasing, but knowledge of their effects on flying species is still limited. Therefore, SAAS also supports additional studies - to be conducted after the projects are operational - to determine actual impacts to birds and bats. Such studies would benefit the wind industry by providing information on how to site projects to avoid conflicts with birds and bats. The value of the post-construction mortality studies is dependent upon the collected data being made readily available to the public. In addition, we urge that any project's approval be contingent on both 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, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's "Guidelines for Conducting Bird and Bat Studies at Commercial Wind Energy Projects," the draft of which is currently under review.

The Southern Adirondack Audubon Society's primary goal is to "protect the environment by preserving natural habitats;" therefore, SAAS supports wind power as a clean, renewable source of energy when produced at a facility which has been properly engineered and sited to mitigate potential negative impacts to birds, bats, other wildlife, and their habitats.

Approved by the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society Board of Directors, May 20, 2008