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## Killing Wind's Dream

### Sub Title:

Dead birds hamper development

[Ken Silverstein](#) [1]

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The same groups that have long opposed the increased use of fossil fuels are acting now to prevent any further damage to wildlife, all around the country. Wind developers are feeling the pain.

Northern California's progressive environmental attitudes are being tested. Some wind mills in the San Francisco area are killing certain exotic species such as golden eagles and red-tailed hawks that are coming into contact with them.

The same groups that have long opposed the increased use of fossil fuels are acting now to prevent any further damage to wildlife, all around the country. In the Northern California case, the area involves the [Diablo Mountains](#) [3] -- a migratory bird route that is regulated by the federal government. That's prompted the [U.S. Bureau of Land Management](#) [4] to suspend the issuance of all wind permits on public lands until developers can fix the problem.

"We fully support responsible development and protection of wildlife, and the industry has a long history of being proactive in this area," says Susan Reilly, chief executive of [RES America](#) [5], before Congress. "But it doesn't seem reasonable to hold wind developers to a standard with respect to eagles that is more stringent than what's required for endangered species, which are by definition more imperiled than an unlisted species."

According to her testimony, modern wind turbines have significantly curtailed bird fatalities. Since 1984, she says that less than 1 percent of all human-caused eagle deaths are the result of wind turbines. Half of all such accidents are because of birds flying into power lines.

Nevertheless, the current restrictions on wind farms on public lands has hampered the development of four wind proposals totaling 416 megawatts that had been on the "fast track" permitting process. If they don't get approved before year-end, they will lose their eligibility to win stimulus funds -- something that the Democrats in Congress are trying to remedy by extending that opportunity for a year.

The wind association says that the current dilemma has stalled \$68 billion in investment. That, in turn, jeopardizes 34,000 total megawatts of wind construction that would provide 27,500 jobs.

“If we don't find ways to reduce these emissions, far more birds—and people—will be threatened by global warming than by wind turbines,” says former [Audubon Society](#) [6] President John Flicker. “Our challenge is thus to help design and locate wind-power projects that minimize the negative impacts on birds.”

### Fly Like an Eagle

The Florida Everglades is another place where the battle over wind mills is heating up. The marshes in that Southern Florida area are home to egrets, herons and ducks, as well as the focus of a \$15 billion investment to attract birds that had once made a home of those waters, reports [Politico](#) [7]. That has hamstrung the Wind Capital Group from applying for federal and state permits, although the online pub says that the firm is hoping to get that 150-megawatt deal going by year-end.

The opposition is a bit ironic given that wind power has general public acceptance. The desire for clean energy has prompted about half of all states to enact laws requiring utilities to hold more green energy in their portfolios. But those demands are running headfirst into the age-old dilemma of resistant neighborhoods and wildlife concerns -- all on top of the stark truth that the wind does not blow on demand and can't easily get hooked into the grid.

Getting wind plants permitted is no different than other generators. It requires addressing key issues before potential shortages occur by establishing neighborhood meetings and creating a common communication strategy. Wind must follow some particulars that include finding locations with an annual average wind speed of 14.7 miles per hour as well being able to interconnect with transmission systems.

Community relations play a role in getting projects built. And so does regulatory outreach. The American Wind Association says that it supports the goals laid out by the U.S. Department of the Interior to “fast track” a host of renewable projects on federal lands that would supply electricity to millions of homes. But it cautions that such words are a far cry from making a stern commitment.

“The roadblocks ... have played a significant role in the failure of fast-tracked (and other) wind projects to successfully complete the permitting process,” says Reilly with RES Americas. “RES therefore submits that to reduce the roadblocks to renewable energy development on public lands, there must be a strong federal commitment to completing renewable energy projects on public lands.”

Such dedication involves not just the streamlining of the permitting process but also the conviction of regulators to stand by projects -- something that will make it easier to win financing and get projects built. It sounds simple. But wind developers are learning that they, too, have to be more environmentally mindful.

EnergyBiz Insider has been named Honorable Mention for Best Online Column by Media Industry News, MIN. Ken Silverstein has also been named one of the Top Economics Journalists by Wall Street Economists.

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#### **First Published Date:**

Fri, 06/10/2011

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