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DRIESSEN: Big Wind tax credit exterminates endangered species

Thousands of birds killed by wind turbines

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By Paul Driessen

Saturday, December 22, 2012

The [American Wind Energy Association \(/topics/american-wind-energy-association/\)](#) wants its production tax credit (PTC) for wind electricity extended yet again. [Congress \(/topics/congress/\)](#) should say no — and terminate the PTC now.

Wind energy is expensive and unreliable. It does nothing to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. It is land- and raw-materials-intensive, parasitic and redundant. Whenever the wind is low or inconsistent, every megawatt of wind power must be supported by electricity generated by fossil-fuel plants. Even more damning, wind turbines disrupt wildlife habitats and butcher birds and bats that are vital to ecological diversity and agriculture.

The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/\)](#) (FWS [\(/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/\)](#)) and [American Bird Conservancy \(/topics/american-bird-conservancy/\)](#) say wind turbines kill 440,000 bald and golden eagles, hawks, falcons, owls, cranes, egrets, geese and other birds every year in the United States, along with countless insect-eating bats.

New studies reveal that these appalling estimates are frightfully low and based on misleading or even fraudulent data. The horrific reality is that in the United States alone, “eco-friendly” wind turbines kill an estimated 13 million to 39 million birds and bats every year.

These shocking figures reflect the presence of more than 39,000 turbines in the United States, many located in habitats with large numbers of raptors, other birds and bats, says [Mark Duchamp \(/topics/mark-duchamp/\)](#), president of Save the Eagles International. The estimates are based on a 2012 study by the [Spanish Ornithological Society \(/topics/spanish-ornithological-society/\)](#), which used data from 136 official turbine-monitoring studies in [Spain \(/topics/spain/\)](#), and is corroborated by a 1993 study of bird mortality from wind turbines in [Germany \(/topics/germany/\)](#) and [Sweden \(/topics/sweden/\)](#), [Mr. Duchamp \(/topics/mark-duchamp/\)](#) says.

Over the past 25 years, an estimated 2,300 golden eagles have been killed by turbines just at Altamont Pass, Calif. According to Save the Eagles International biologist [Jim Wiegand \(/topics/jim-wiegand/\)](#), the subsidized slaughter “could now easily be over 500” golden eagles a year in our Western states, plus many bald eagles. Entire flocks of birds often get mowed down by turbine blades, whose tips move at 100 to 200 mph.

In an 86-square-mile area blanketed by the Altamont wind facility, no eagles have nested for more than 20 years even though the area is prime habitat, [Mr. Wiegand \(/topics/jim-wiegand/\)](#) says. Overall, there has been an 80 percent population decline for the golden eagle in Southern California, he notes.

Since wind turbines began proliferating, Oregon has had a 47 percent loss of raptors and Iowa has experienced a 42 percent decline in bird populations, according to FWS ([/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/](#)) and Department of Natural Resources ([/topics/department-of-natural-resources/](#)) research.

After being nursed back from the brink of extinction, magnificent 5-foot-tall whooping cranes face annihilation because of thousands of turbines within their 200-mile-wide, 2,500-mile-long migration route, former FWS ([/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/](#)) whooping crane coordinator Tom Stehn ([/topics/tom-stehn/](#)) fears.

More than 200 endangered cranes have “gone missing” in recent years, and now FWS ([/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/](#)) is delaying its 2012 “whooper” count until after Congress ([/topics/congress/](#)) votes on the PTC. It also has changed its methods for counting turbine kills to ones Mr. Stehn ([/topics/tom-stehn/](#)) calls “unacceptable and useless for species recovery management.”

The new methods help hide turbine kills, according to Mr. Wiegand ([/topics/jim-wiegand/](#)). The Interior Department has used sage grouse and lesser prairie chickens to justify restrictions on oil leasing and drilling. It has prosecuted oil companies for the unintentional deaths of 28 mallards in North Dakota. Yet it has never penalized a single wind-turbine company.

Now the Fish and Wildlife Service ([/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/](#)) wants to issue “programmatic take permits” that would allow wind-turbine operators to systematically, legally and “inadvertently” injure and kill eagles, cranes and condors.

The Department of the Interior and FWS ([/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/](#)) also let monitoring ornithologists search for dead birds within 130 to 165 feet of turbine towers, thus missing numerous birds that were flung farther by the impact or limped off to die elsewhere. What’s more, they search for carcasses only once every few weeks, enabling scavengers to take most away. In addition, wind facility crews remove and bury carcasses illegally, Mr. Wiegand ([/topics/jim-wiegand/](#)) and Mr. Duchamp ([/topics/mark-duchamp/](#)) say.

Officials also let operators treat kill data as proprietary trade secrets, safeguarded under nondisclosure agreements or put into private databanks immune from Freedom of Information Act requests. They impose high security at turbine sites to make accurate, honest, independent mortality counts impossible. Moreover, they filter, massage and manipulate data to make mortality appear minimal.

No other American industry is allowed to operate with such immunity and impunity. It is time to end the wind PTC and the blatant favoritism and exemptions for the wind-power industry. Big Wind must be held to the same standards, laws and regulations that apply to other industries.

Industrial wind operators must be required to permit access by unbiased outside experts to their facilities to ensure compliance with the law and facilitate regular and independent bird and bat mortality counts. They must be required to comply with the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act and other environmental laws.

Before acting on the PTC, Congress ([/topics/congress/](#)) should demand an accurate and verifiable 2012 winter count for the whooping cranes, hold hearings on bird and bat kills, and prohibit the FWS ([/topics/us-fish-and-wildlife-service/](#)) from implementing a programmatic take permit system. It should demand an independent multiyear study of bird and bat mortality at every wind facility in America before allowing another turbine facility to be built in the United States.

Failure to take these actions will cause an ecological catastrophe of monumental proportions.

Paul Driessen is senior policy adviser for the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow and author of “Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death” (Merril Press, 2012).

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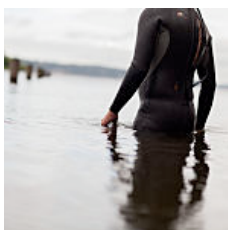
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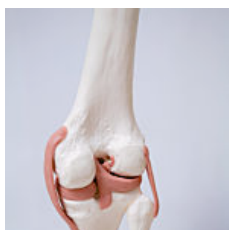
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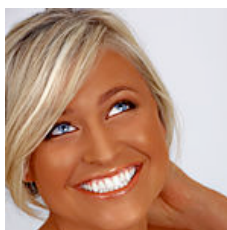
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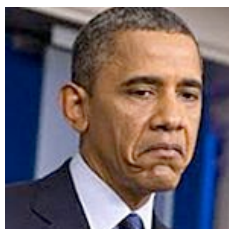
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