

Proposed Wind Power Project Deemed Safe for Wildlife

Local News

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Posted on : September 4, 2009 at 5:39 am

ABERDEEN, Wash. - A draft conservation plan and independent study results assessing potential impacts on marbled murrelets at a proposed wind power project near Naselle, Wash. will be submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service this week.

The draft conservation plan, prepared by nationally recognized experts, concluded the proposed Radar Ridge Wind Project would have minor or insignificant impacts on marbled murrelets, and other wildlife populations in the area. The murrelet is an endangered species listed as threatened.

"We are pleased the independent studies confirmed that the development of Radar Ridge is very unlikely to significantly impact murrelets and other species in the area," said Matt Samuelson, Radar Ridge participants committee chair. "Wisely developed wind projects can provide clean energy and drive our economy while caring for the environment."

Development of the Radar Ridge project is being considered by four western Washington public utility districts: Clallam County PUD No. 1, Grays Harbor PUD No. 1, Pacific County PUD No. 2, and Mason County PUD No. 3, in conjunction with Energy Northwest, a consortium of 27 Washington State public power providers.

The independent studies, on which the draft conservation plan is based, were prepared by Western EcoSystems Technology, Inc. and Hamer Environmental, nationally recognized as a marbled murrelet expert. The findings indicate the proposed project site has low passage rates over the ridge top for all bird and bat species, including birds of prey, migratory birds and the marbled murrelet. The study was conducted in consultation with state and federal wildlife agencies and their published guidelines.

The study's specific findings included:

Conservative estimates indicate less than one marbled murrelet would be harmed each year as a direct result of the Radar Ridge project.

Surveys of marbled murrelet flight patterns show very low activity through areas over the ridge top near the proposed wind turbine locations. Even so, a high proportion of the passage rates were at an elevation higher than the wind turbine blades.

Habitat at the site is unsuitable for marbled murrelet nesting because of past and present forest management practices and land use, which resulted in no old-growth forest in the project area.

Adequate buffer exists between the project area and potentially active marbled murrelet nesting habitat nearby. The coexistence of the project within the marbled murrelet conservation zone should not significantly hinder conservation and recovery.

The project, proposed on Washington State Department of Natural Resources land, could generate up to 82 megawatts of electricity; enough energy to power approximately 18,000 homes. It is expected to consist of up to 32 wind turbines on towers no taller than approximately 262 feet.

The site is on State Trust land, meaning that revenue from the project will help pay for construction of public schools, universities, and other state institutions, and fund county services.

Radar Ridge is slated to be the first large-scale wind project in western Washington. The site has existing nearby electricity transmission lines with adequate available capacity to support the project. The location will also ease some aspects of electricity transmission congestion caused by increased renewable energy flowing from eastern Washington wind resources to the western side of the state.

The project is also favored for its "winter peaking" potential because it is expected to produce the majority of its power in the winter months when the participating utilities need it most.

"The participants remain fully committed to obtaining all required environmental permits in consultation with the appropriate agencies to ensure the project is developed in a manner protective of the environment," said Samuelson.

The not-for-profit utility group is pursuing the project to help meet renewable energy mandates imposed on Washington's PUDs by Initiative 937 in 2006. They estimate the project may begin operations as early as late fall 2011.