

## A Coalition of More than 70 Groups asks Interior Secretary Sally Jewell to Develop a National Plan Dealing with Birds and Wind Power Plants

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Conservation groups have formally asked Interior Secretary Sally Jewell to develop a national plan for siting commercial-scale wind-power plants in locations that cause the least amount of impacts to birds, bats and other sensitive wildlife.

The coalition of more than 70 groups -- including the American Bird Conservancy, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, the Trust for Public Land and WildEarth Guardians -- sent a four-page letter to Jewell arguing that a detailed plan is needed to highlight areas best suited for large-scale wind development and, perhaps more importantly, to identify areas where such development would cause too many natural resource conflicts. <[http://www.abcbirds.org/pdfs/Wind\\_EIS\\_Sign\\_On\\_Letter\\_to\\_Secretary.pdf](http://www.abcbirds.org/pdfs/Wind_EIS_Sign_On_Letter_to_Secretary.pdf)>

The coalition asks Jewell to follow the path the Interior Department forged several years ago for commercial-scale solar development on federal land in the Southwest. That approach involved the development of a solar programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) finalized in 2012 that identified 17 solar energy zones (SEZs) in six Western states for streamlined development.

A similar system identifying areas on federal land where commercial-scale wind development should be focused could reduce documented bird and bat deaths at wind farms, as well as reduce impacts to habitat of ground-dwelling birds like the imperiled greater sage grouse, the groups say.

"When it comes to wind energy, siting is everything," the groups wrote. "Indeed, we believe that much of this conflict could be averted by a National Wind Energy Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which would determine where wind energy should be developed and where it should not.

"Siting wind energy turbines in major bird migration routes, in or near critical breeding habitat, and in or near other sensitive areas, such as wetlands, wildlife refuges and parks, and priority Greater Sage-Grouse habitat poses far too great a risk to our public trust resources, including birds and bats," they added.

But critics note that the Bureau of Land Management already conducted a PEIS for wind in 2005 that analyzed potential commercial-scale wind development on federal lands in the West. And in 2008, BLM issued a wind energy policy that included measures to mitigate potential impacts on birds, wildlife habitat and other resource values.

In addition, Interior in 2012 finalized voluntary federal guidelines aimed at siting and operating wind farms in ways that minimize impacts to birds, bats and wildlife habitat. A Fish and Wildlife Service advisory committee that included industry officials, conservation leaders, representatives of American Indian tribes, and federal and state regulators developed the wind guidelines over a five-year period.

"I'm puzzled by the [coalition's] request and don't see that it adds anything to wildlife protection beyond these previously finalized documents," said Tom Vinson, vice president for federal regulatory affairs with the American Wind Energy Association.

Vinson noted the coalition's letter states that proper siting and operation of wind farms includes "pre-construction assessments of risk leading to proper siting, post-construction mitigation and independent

monitoring of [bird] fatalities," all of which the industry is already doing.

"It really does beg the question of how what they are asking for is any different than the standard practices of the industry today," Vinson said.

But the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) has argued for years that iron-clad federal regulations, not voluntary guidelines, are needed to properly site wind projects.

And Robert Johns, an ABC spokesman, said that BLM's 2005 PEIS for wind was conducted long before the explosive growth in wind power that's taken place in the last five years under the Obama administration and needs to be revisited.

"The landscape has changed dramatically in almost 10 years," Johns said. "Right now, wind farms are exploding all over the country. You have a completely different view and scale of activity than you had before. And secondly, there's a far greater understanding of the impacts of this kind of development on wildlife."

The coalition states in the letter that such a national wind energy plan is wholly consistent with the developing national landscape-level mitigation strategy for Interior agencies that Jewell unveiled earlier this month (Greenwire, April 10). <<http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1059997717>>

The groups ask in the letter to meet with Jewell, BLM Director Neil Kornze and FWS Director Dan Ashe to discuss the request for a national wind energy plan.

"The signatories to this letter believe that birds and other native wildlife are important to Americans and that every precaution should be taken to minimize fatalities due to for-profit energy development," Michael Hutchins, national coordinator of the American Bird Conservancy's Bird Smart Wind Energy Campaign, said in a statement. "This process would identify those areas where wind should not be developed, but would not preclude the need to conduct site-specific risk assessments for wind projects outside those areas."

Interior has received the letter and is currently reviewing the coalition's request, Jessica Kershaw, a department spokeswoman in Washington, D.C., said in an email.

Kershaw added that Jewell "is in favor of a smart, coordinated approach to conservation and development," pointing to the landscape-level mitigation strategy, "which helps to outline the key principles and actions we need to take to successfully shift from a reactive, project-by-project approach to more predictable and effective management of the lands and resources that we manage on behalf of the American public."