

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society
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To:
Brianna Gary
NYSDEC Bureau of Habitat
625 Broadway, 5th Floor
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February 29, 2008

Comments on:

**Proposed Guidelines on Conducting Bird and Bat Studies
at Commercial Wind Energy Projects**

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society whose members are residents of Warren, Washington and northern Saratoga counties. We are committed to the protection of natural ecosystems focusing on birds and other wildlife.

SAAS is pleased that the Department of Environmental Conservation has produced guidelines which will afford protection of bird and bat species threatened by the development of wind energy projects in New York State. We are thankful for the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Guidelines for Conducting Bird and Bat Studies at Commercial Wind Energy Projects.

We recognize the necessity to develop alternate means of energy production, thus reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and the resulting destructive effects on the environment. In general, we are supportive of wind projects as a cleaner source of energy, causing less impact on the environment. We realize, however, that strict procedures must be enacted for the protection of wildlife in the areas affected by wind farm construction. Without guidelines such as these, and given the sheer numbers of proposed wind energy projects, it is inevitable that irreversible destruction would occur to avian nesting habitat, migratory bird routes would be forever altered, and bat foraging habitat would be rendered useless.

We applaud the comprehensiveness of the guidelines. We would, however, like to express our concerns about the procedures for surveying bird species. Adjustments to the timing or frequency of surveys, as noted below, would provide a more accurate accounting of avian use of project sites.

1. The recommendation of a minimum of one year of pre-construction studies is inadequate. Many factors, such as weather, the availability of food, and other site specific variables, affect both the specific migration paths of birds and the use of an area for nesting. Harshness of winter weather and snow depth will greatly affect the use of any given area by wintering raptors. A minimum of two years of intensive study, covering all seasons of use, should be required of the developer.
2. Pre-construction breeding bird surveys should be expanded. A single observer, surveying only twice in a breeding season, may not get an accurate assessment of the

use of the area by breeding bird species. Inaccurate information could then be used as a basis for an erroneous decision about expanded studies.

3. The raptor migration study period must be extended to begin earlier in the year and end later than proposed. The dates proposed in the guidelines provide too narrow a window to give an accurate assessment of areas used by migrating raptors. Although GPS tracking of Golden Eagles was only initiated in recent years, there is data available through the Field Research Department of the National Aviary, in partnership with the Powdermill Avian Research Center, proving that these birds move north through New York State as early as March. Southward migration has shown eagles in our state as late as mid-December.
4. Due to the highly variable timing of songbird migration, surveying only once per week could overlook major songbird movement. If done more frequently, surveying would offer a more accurate assessment of the area's usage by migrants; alternately, radar use in pre-construction studies would give the highest level of accuracy.

Thank you for considering our views. We appreciate the time and effort expended to develop these guidelines.

Sincerely,

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