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Leading bird conservation group responds to proposed eagle take permit

American Bird Conservancy (ABC), www.abcbirds.org 6 January 2012

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently considering an application from West Butte Wind Power LLC for a permit under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The permit would allow for the incidental take of a limited number of Golden Eagles at their proposed facility in central Oregon. This application is the first of its kind for a wind project; historically, many industry developers have ignored permitting altogether and built wind farms at sites with little or no regard for the potential impacts on eagles, resulting in the deaths of possibly thousands of these birds in recent decades.

American Bird Conservancy – the nation’s leading bird conservation organization – is undertaking a careful, in-depth review of the proposed permit conditions.

“As with any permit to allow the unintentional take of birds, the devil is in the details. We need to make sure that all possible eagle deaths are avoided at this site, and that the government follows its own rules for issuing such a permit. In order to have time to do this review, we are asking the government to extend the 30 day comment period to 60 days,” said Kelly Fuller, ABC’s Wind Coordinator.

“Developers in all industry sectors, including wind energy, should be required to do everything possible to minimize their adverse effects on birds. But even with the best mitigation, their activities may result in unintentional, yet foreseeable impacts, including sometimes the deaths of eagles. A permitting system for this accidental take is critical because without it, the government is not in a position to deny the issuance of permits for the most damaging projects,” said George Fenwick, ABC’s President.

“A permitting system enables the government to fully assess each circumstance to ensure everything possible is being done to minimize bird deaths, and to require developers to compensate for any unavoidable bird impacts through the establishment of habitat or other conservation programs. Without such a permitting system, wind development will continue to be a free-for-all that kills hundreds of thousands of birds each year,” Fenwick said.

ABC supports bird-smart wind energy that is properly sited, constructed, and operated to minimize bird impacts, with appropriate compensatory mitigation for unavoidable losses. ABC leads a coalition of more than 60 groups promoting mandatory federal standards to protect birds,

including Golden Eagles and their habitats, from wind energy development rather than the voluntary guidelines proposed by the federal government and backed by the wind industry.

Last month, ABC formally petitioned the federal government to regulate the wind industry's impacts on migratory birds. ABC has also publicized the federal government's double standard of prosecuting oil companies for killing legally protected birds but not prosecuting wind energy companies for doing the same.

The public can help protect birds at wind power projects by endorsing ABC's petition to regulate the wind industry.

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American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit membership organization whose mission is to conserve native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. ABC acts by safeguarding the rarest species, conserving and restoring habitats, and reducing threats, while building capacity in the bird conservation movement.

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