

Double standard exists for energy companies

So why are wind companies not being prosecuted for killing birds? Rob Lee, now retired, was one of the Fish and Wildlife Service's lead law-enforcement investigators on the problem of bird kills in Western oil fields. Lee said that he doesn't expect to see any prosecutions because the wind industry is politically correct. This suggests a double standard. In protecting America's wildlife, federal law-enforcement officials are turning their backs on the harm done by "green" energy.
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On August 13 of this year, ExxonMobil Corp. pleaded guilty in federal court to the deaths of 85 birds that had come into contact with oil or other pollutants in tanks or waste-water facilities on its properties which were uncovered, writes Robert Bryce in the Wall Street Journal. ExxonMobil was found to be in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which became law in 1918. The company agreed to pay \$600,000 in fines and fees.

Other companies have been found guilty of violating this law. Since 1980, federal officials have initiated hundreds of lawsuits against energy companies. In July, Oregon-based electric utility PacifiCorp paid \$1.4 million in punishment for killing 232 eagles in Wyoming over the past two years. The birds were electrocuted by power lines with faulty designs.

However, another group of energy producers is not being prosecuted for killing birds - wind-power companies. And wind turbines are killing many, many birds every year.

In July 2008, an analysis of the wind farm at Altamont Pass, Calif., east of Oakland, estimated that the wind turbines kill an average of 80 golden eagles per year. According to the Alameda County Community Development Agency, which funded the study, about 10,000 birds - nearly all of which are protected by the migratory bird act - die every year at Altamont. Somehow the Altamont Pass wind farm does not face the same threat of prosecution as ExxonMobil and other "conventional" energy companies, despite the much larger bird kill effects.

Granted, Altamont, which uses older turbine technology, may be the worst offender. Most of the newer wind turbines spin slowly, and kill fewer birds. Nevertheless, total national bird kill rates are very high. According to Michael Fry of the American Bird Conservancy, U.S. wind turbines kill between 75,000 and 275,000 birds per year. Yet the Justice Department is not bringing cases against wind companies.

Wind energy has become a huge industry in Oregon. The Columbia Gorge and north central Oregon are the major wind energy locations.

And the business is lucrative! Earlier this month, energy companies operating three eastern Oregon wind farms were awarded more than \$140 million in federal grants in a fast-track process that saw their applications submitted and approved in 30 days.

The cash grants, part of the Obama administration's economic recovery program, are intended to push completion of renewable wind, solar, geothermal and biomass energy projects. The Oregon projects were awarded more than 25 percent of the \$502 million granted to a dozen projects nationwide.

Environmental and lobby groups are pushing for the U.S. to be producing 20 percent of its electricity from wind by 2030. Meeting that goal will require the U.S. to have about 300,000 megawatts of wind capacity - 12 times the current amount. If that occurs, we can expect at least 300,000 birds to be killed each year.

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