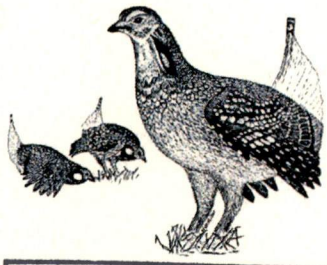
North Dakota Chapter

THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

P.O. Box 1442, Bismarck, ND 58502



14 December 2010

Chairman Kevin Cramer
North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 E. Boulevard, Dept. 408
Bismarck, ND 58505-0480

Chairman Cramer:

This letter is in response to the public hearing on the application of site compatibility for Sequoia Energy US' proposed Border Winds Energy Project in Rolette County. The North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society (Chapter) is generally supportive of the wind industry as a renewable source of energy that can be produced locally. The Chapter is most supportive of wind facilities that are placed in habitats of limited conservation value to wildlife, such as cropland in predominantly agricultural landscapes. The Chapter is pleased that the Border Winds project is largely sited in cropland.

Because the Border Winds project is sited near the Turtle Mountains, the potential for bat mortality exists. Some wind developers have written Avian and Bat Protection Plans for their facilities. The Chapter supports the development of such plans, especially if these plans are written in coordination with state and federal natural-resource agencies, address what pre- and post-operational monitoring will be conducted, how the resulting data will be used and shared, and explains how potential impacts to migratory and resident birds and bats will be avoided, minimized, and mitigated.

The Chapter's primary concern with wind facilities is the potential impact to extensive tracts of native prairie and wildlife. However, since the Border Winds project is situated mainly in cropland, most of the following concerns would apply only to the few acres that impact native prairie, mainly via road construction.

In a 2007 report, *Environmental Impacts of Wind-Energy Projects*, by the National Research Council to the U.S. Congress, the Council recognized that the construction and operation of wind-energy facilities directly influence ecosystem structure. These influences include disturbance, removal of vegetation, soil compaction and erosion, and changes in hydrologic features. Wildlife is impacted directly through mortality or indirectly through alteration of habitat and behavioral avoidance. Furthermore, research conducted in various parts of the United States indicates small-scale displacement of songbirds. Specifically, preliminary research results conducted in North Dakota and South Dakota by the US Geological Survey indicate displacement of some species of grassland songbirds by wind facilities.

In areas where turbine placement on grasslands is unavoidable, or where turbine roads destroy native prairie, the Chapter urges mitigation in ratios exceeding 1:1. That is to say, for every acre of grassland destroyed, more than an acre should be restored or protected. Native prairie should

receive the highest mitigation ratio, followed by planted grasslands. The Chapter realizes that there is no established system in North Dakota for grassland mitigation for wind facilities. However, although no mitigation has been provided to date for grassland impacts, there are examples of mitigation for impacts to Whooping Cranes. Basin Electric Power, BP Alternative Energy and Clipper WindPower Development (for a jointly owned South Dakota project), and NextEra Energy have already committed to mitigation measures for impacts to Whooping Cranes. The Chapter applauds these efforts.

The Chapter understands the proprietary nature of the wind industry when dealing with industry competitors over easements and other issues. However, the Chapter urges wind developers to contact state and federal natural-resource agencies early in the planning process to discuss the entire scope of a wind-resource area, and thus ultimate impact footprint, regardless of current regulations. If contacted early, agencies and wind developers can address concerns over potential cumulative impacts, as well as ways to avoid or minimize them. Although legal, the currently piecemeal approach unfortunately ignores biological realities on the landscape.

Another benefit of early contact with state and federal agencies, as well as other concerned entities, is the opportunity to coordinate efforts to study the potential impacts of wind facilities on wildlife. There are numerous unanswered questions about the impacts of wind facilities on wildlife. Whereas many wind developers conduct pre-operational baseline surveys and sometimes post-operational monitoring surveys, these surveys are not always relevant to a particular region. Money might be better spent on surveys of a different nature. For example, in North Dakota, very little is known about rates of bird and bat mortality or the impacts of turbines on prairie grouse. To our knowledge, very little research is being conducted in the state on these issues. Data from such research would help biologists make better-informed decisions about the impact of wind facilities on wildlife.

Because the Chapter's members are wildlife professionals, the Chapter would be happy to engage wind developers in discussions about our concerns, as well as serving in an advisory capacity.

Sincerely,

Jane Austin

Jane Austin
President, North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society
701-253-5510

[1] Data obtained from opportunistic observations that are annually submitted to USFWS, Ecological Services.

The Wildlife Society is an international, nonprofit, scientific and educational organization composed of professionals, students, and laypersons active and interested in wildlife research, management, education and administration. The NDCTWS is an active affiliate. It is specifically concerned with approaches to effective management of North Dakota's plant and animal communities. The Chapter provides expertise in advising legislative and judicial processes surrounding the controversial management of many natural resource assets. It advocates the holistic treatment of environmental questions. The Chapter was founded in 1963 and incorporated in 1981 under the laws of North Dakota. The NDCTWS would be very willing to engage the PSC in issues concerning wildlife impacts from wind facilities, as well as offer advice based on member's expertise in matters of wildlife management and impacts of human-derived disturbances.