

Summary of Results for Avian Surveys for Ashtabula III Wind Energy Center

Avian use surveys were conducted in spring 2010 for the northern portion of the Project area. The spring 2010 survey included 13 weeks of surveys from March 26 through June 17 at 8 point count locations. No federally listed species were observed, although six North Dakota Level I Species in Greatest Need of Conservation were observed, including: willet, upland sandpiper, Swainson's hawk, American white pelican, black tern, and grasshopper sparrow. Five Level North Dakota Level II species (in need of conservation but has support from other wildlife programs) were observed, including: bald eagle, bobolink, northern harrier, northern pintail, and sharp-tailed grouse. A permit is not required for the take of these species, but many of them are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The species with the highest mean use was the Canada goose, followed by the common grackle and snow goose. The species with the highest encounter rate (flying at height of proposed rotor swept area) was the double-crested cormorant. Raptor nest surveys and prairie grouse lek surveys were also conducted. A total of seven raptor nests were observed, all red-tailed hawk nests; three of these were active. One active sharp-tailed grouse lek was observed.

The southern portion of the Project area was included surveys conducted in fall 2007 and spring 2008 for the Ashtabula Wind Energy Center (Case No. PU-08-32). The surveys included 12 point count locations in the fall survey and 15 locations in the spring survey.

In the fall 2007 survey, songbirds had the highest mean use out of all species groups observed. The most commonly observed species, the red-winged blackbird, common grackle, and horned lark are all widespread species and have relatively stable populations. Thus, local mortality is not expected to have population level consequences for most species observed. Many blackbird species are regarded as agricultural pests and are unlikely to elicit concern from wildlife agencies. Waterfowl also had very high mean use. Commonly observed species included the Canada goose and mallard. Lake Ashtabula is a potential breeding and staging area for waterfowl and other water birds, shorebirds, and wading birds. The Project area also contains smaller bodies of water including Larson Slough and Adams Slough. In post-construction mortality studies at other wind energy projects, waterfowl mortality was generally low. Canada goose mortality in particular is very rare at wind farms. However, waterfowl mortality increased at sites with significant sources of open water near turbines. Due to the large numbers of waterfowl observed during the fall survey, waterfowl mortality could result, but should not have population level impacts because high rates of waterfowl mortality have not been documented.

Red-tailed hawks and northern harriers were the most commonly observed raptor species during the fall avian survey. Red-tailed hawks, the major contributor to overall raptor use, were observed in 19.7 percent of all surveys. Red-tailed hawks have a propensity to fly within the rotor swept area, and as a result are at risk of being killed by turbines. Harriers were also commonly observed, but because of their propensity to fly below the rotor swept area, their risk of mortality from collisions is low.

No federally listed threatened or endangered species were observed during fall avian surveys; however, five species (the American white pelican, Franklin's gull, Swainson's hawk, northern harrier, and sharp-tailed grouse) are North Dakota State Species of Conservation Priority.

In the spring 2008 survey, the most commonly observed species were snow goose, red-winged blackbird, Canada goose, and American coot . All of these are widespread species and have relatively stable populations. Red-tailed hawks were the most commonly observed raptor and were found to be nesting in the area. Red-tailed hawks have a propensity to fly within the rotor swept areaand, as a result, are at risk of being killed by turbines. However, red-tailed hawks are widespread throughout North America, and populations appear to be relatively stable and mortalities are not anticipated to have population-level impacts. No federally-listed species were observed during the 2008 spring surveys; however, the bald eagle, protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA), was detected. In addition to the bald eagle, 18 species were detected that are North Dakota State Species of Conservation Priority.