Fed guidelines don't affect Wyo. wind project

BOB MOEN - Associated Press - Associated Press

The developer of a proposed large wind farm in Wyoming says it's already following practices outlined in new federal guidelines on where such projects should be located to reduce the number of bird deaths.

The Power Co. of Wyoming, a subsidiary of Denver-based Anschutz Corp., is proposing to build a 1,000-turbine wind farm in Carbon County in southern Wyoming.

Garry Miller, the company's vice president of land and environmental affairs, said Wednesday the company is doing extensive studies on how to avoid and minimize potential harm to migratory birds, eagles and other wildlife that inhabit the area where the wind turbines would be placed.

"What we're doing is we are applying best available science and looking at best industry practices," Miller said. "I think, from our standpoint, these guidelines really validate what we've done and the work that we've undertaken."

The effort includes using sophisticated radar to track bird migration and movements within the proposed project area, he said.

For instance, the radar already has shown that the wind turbines will not impede any bird migrations because the birds fly too high over the area, he said.

The voluntary guidelines issued last week by the U.S. Interior Department call on the wind industry to eliminate from consideration areas that would pose high risks to birds and other wildlife, and to take steps to alleviate problems by restoring nearby habitat and other actions. If developers follow the guidelines, they are unlikely to be prosecuted under federal law in the event of bird deaths.

Exact statistics for the number of birds killed by wind turbines are not available, but a 2008 study by a biologist with the Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that wind farms were killing about 440,000 birds per year in the United States.

Miller said the growing wind industry has become more and more conscious of harming wildlife.

"I really just look at this as a logical progression of the industry as it matures and we have more experience," he said. "And I would say that I think these onshore wind energy guidelines released by the service last Friday are also just an extension of that."

Loyd Drain, executive director of the Wyoming Infrastructure Authority, said Wyoming has nearly two dozen wind farm projects under various stages of

development.

"We have a number of wind developers in the state that continue to develop their projects and will comply I'm sure," he said.

Drain said he was glad the federal guidelines were voluntary because they could hamper development if they were mandatory.

Wyoming already has taken steps on its own to protect areas that the sensitive sage grouse inhabit from wind development, he said.

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