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Maple Ridge Wind Farm Completes First Year of Study

New York's Largest Wind Farm Conducts Most Extensive Evaluation of Birds and Bats for a Wind Project in the Eastern U.S.

LOWVILLE, New York – In order to demonstrate their commitment to the environment, the Maple Ridge Wind Farm and its owners, PPM Energy and Horizon Wind Energy are conducting the most extensive post-construction avian and bat mortality studies ever performed at an eastern United States wind project.

The project today released the “Annual Report for the Maple Ridge Wind Power Project, Post-construction Bird and Bat Fatality Study—2006” prepared by the consulting firm Curry and Kerlinger (May, 2007).

Because the project itself was not operational until mid-2006, the report did not cover portions of the spring bird migration, and thus definitive estimates of bird mortality are not yet available. However, the bird carcasses that were found during the study included no species listed in state or federal endangered species lists, and only one raptor, an American kestrel.

For bats, the June to November study covered an estimate 90 percent of the period during which bats are at risk and resulted in an estimated 9.2 to 14.9 bats per megawatt per season. The mix of species identified included a similar mix of species found during other wind project mortality surveys, with the largest number of incidents among hoary bats, with smaller numbers of silver-haired, little brown, red and other relatively common bat species. No bat species listed in state or federal endangered species lists were found.

A multi-agency public/private team conducted the first year of a four-year study using methodology defined by the Project Technical Advisory Committee, which is comprised of the following membership: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, New York State Audubon Society, Curry and Kerlinger (responsible for implementing the design and execution of the study), Environmental Design & Research (responsible for environmental studies to support permitting for Maple Ridge Wind Farm), PPM Energy and Horizon Wind Energy. Dr. James Gibbs of State University of New York Environmental Science and Forestry was the consultant for statistical review.

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The 2006 study protocol was as follows:

- 50 turbines and two meteorological towers were included in the survey. (Ten turbines and one meteorological tower were checked daily, 10 turbines and one meteorological tower were checked every third day and 30 turbines are checked weekly.)
- Turbines were selected randomly, but included all representative habitat types for the project.
- Grass and other vegetation beneath the turbines were cut or cleared regularly to make it easy for searchers to find dead bats. Searcher efficiency and scavenging rate studies were also performed.
- Any carcasses found were collected and frozen for identification by experts. Bat carcasses were subject to genetic testing for species identification, radioisotope testing for determining areas of origin and mercury testing to determine bioaccumulation of pollution from fossil-burning power plants.

“The information we collect at Maple Ridge will be used to help make wind farms in New York State and across the country safer for birds and bats and help us better assess sites for new wind projects,” said Horizon Wind Energy development director Patrick Doyle.

In addition, the Maple Ridge Wind Farm is working closely with the New York State Energy Research and Development, Authority (NYSERDA) to facilitate NYSERDA-funded advanced radar analysis of bird and bat migration at Maple Ridge, planned for the migrations seasons of 2007 and 2008.

“On top of this extensive monitoring, the Maple Ridge Wind Farm is working with the Bat Wind Energy Cooperative and researchers from Bat Conservation International to see if we can field test experimental bat deterrent devices at Maple Ridge during the summer of 2007,” said Andy Linehan, PPM Energy’s director of wind permitting.

Final bird and bat mortality figures from the study have been posted on the Maple Ridge Wind Farm Web site www.mapleridgewind.com.

In addition to the post-construction studies described above, Maple Ridge also conducted a summer bat study, a fall migration radar and night vision study, Phase I Avian Risk Assessment, and a Breeding Bird Survey before the project was approved for construction. Additionally, Maple Ridge contributed significant funding to state agency efforts for a Spring Indiana Bat dispersal study and has completed one year of the on-site study of grassland birds and their habitat

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