

MARYLAND AIMS TO PROTECT BIRDS FROM WIND POWER PLANTS

Maryland state regulators want to require developers of two proposed wind power plants in western Maryland to shut down the giant turbines during periods when the whirling blades could kill large numbers of migratory birds.

The condition, apparently the first of its kind in the nation, is aimed at balancing the interests of wildlife advocates and wind power developers, who are racing to build the plants by Dec. 31, 2003, when a federal tax incentive expires.

“We are supporting both plants on an expedited schedule but we are building in contingencies in the event there are problems,” Paul Massicot, director of the Department of Natural Resources’ Resource Assessment Services division said Wednesday. “The last thing we want to happen at a wind energy plant is a big environmental problem.”

One of the companies, U.S. Wind Force of Baden, Pa., has agreed to shut down its proposed windmill farm in Allegany County for up to 18 hours a year if the 25 turbines are found to kill more than 200 birds or bats per windmill in a 24-hour period, president Thomas Matthews said.

The other company, Clipper Windpower of Carpinteria, Calif., is in talks with the DNR about the agency’s proposed condition requiring shutdowns of up to 53.7 hours a year if Clipper’s planned 67 turbines in Garrett County are found to kill the same number of flying creatures, Kevin Rackstraw, the company’s director of East Coast development, said.