

CONGRESSMEN CALL FOR STUDY OF WINDMILLS

Congressmen Nick Rahall (D. WV) and Alan Mollohan (D. WV) have asked the General Accounting Office to study the impact of wind turbines on wildlife, with particular emphasis on the requirements of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald Eagle Protection Act.

In the June 22, 2004, letter, Mr. Rahall and Mr. Mollohan noted the “tremendous recent growth” in the development of wind energy. They also cited the growth of this industry along the Allegheny Front region of the Appalachian Plateau in the States of West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. “Of great significance, the region is a major avian flyway for hundreds of migrant bird species, including bald and golden eagles. Ornithologists, in fact, estimate that approximately 1.7 million birds per night migrate over the Allegheny Front during the migration season. It would appear then that continued growth of wind energy along the Allegheny Front represents an imminent threat to literally hundreds of different migratory bird species.” the letter said.

On May 13, 2003, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service issued an “interim guidance” in response to this threat. The interim guidance is a set of voluntary guidelines intended to provide technical assistance to the wind industry to avoid or minimize impacts to birds and wildlife through the following: 1) proper evaluation of potential wind energy sites; 2) proper location and design of wind turbines; and 3) pre- and post-construction mortality research and monitoring. It is the effectiveness of this interim guidance in protecting migratory birds that Mr. Rahall and Mr. Mollohan seek to have the General Accounting Office determine.

- Considering the escalation of wind turbine development along the Allegheny Front, how serious a threat to migratory bird populations does this growing industry present? Can bird mortality be reasonably mitigated or prevented?
- How and by what agencies are wind turbines regulated by the Federal Government, and to what extent are migratory bird impacts considered?
- Does the administrative record of project applications indicate that the interim guidance has positively altered projects to protect migratory birds?
- What are the responsibilities of State wildlife agencies to protect migratory birds from impacts caused by wind energy projects located on non-federal lands? Do they have a regulatory or strictly consultative role?

Those wishing to discuss the letter of Mr. Mollohan and Mr. Rahall’s interest in the matter may contact their offices at (202) 225-3452 (Mr. Rahall) or (202) 225-4172 (Mr. Mollohan). The complete text of the letter appears on page 20 of this issue of the *Voice*.