

# US wind farms get extended protection from penalties for killing eagles

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A sunrise view is seen at EDF Renewable's field of gigantic wind turbines, which stand nearly 300 feet high near Rio Vista, Calif., Sept. 24, 2012. Photo: Bob Chamberlin/Los Angeles Times/MCT

SEATTLE — U.S. government officials announced Friday that some wind power companies will be allowed to kill or injure bald and golden eagles for up to 30 years — without penalty. The decision highlights the clash between two environmental goals — producing energy in an earth-friendly manner and preserving wildlife.

Conservation groups slammed the Obama administration's new regulation. They said it was a stunningly bad move for wildlife. But, wind industry officials said that the rules from the Department of the Interior were not a "free ride."

"It's outrageous that the government is sanctioning the killing of America's symbol, the bald eagle," National Audubon Society President David Yarnold said. He says the government didn't balance the need for conservation with renewable, or green, energy like wind power.

Peter Kelley, a spokesman for the American Wind Energy Association, disagreed. He said that for a wind farm to be permitted under the new rules, "you have to document all of the different ways you'll preserve the eagles. You'll be checked on every five years. Even then, if more eagles are dying than you expected, you have to do more things or lose your permit."

## **Permits Extended To 30 Years**

The government began issuing permits in 2009 to renewable energy companies. It allowed for the killing of bald and golden eagles, which are protected by the government. The early permits lasted five years at most. The industry said that was not enough. They argued that the permits needed to be longer to make spending money on wind power farms worthwhile.

The new regulations would extend the permits to no more than 30 years. But, they will be issued only to companies that run their business "to ensure the preservation of eagles," the Interior Department said.

Kelley said the new regulations would "increase the protection of eagles and will help develop more wind farms, a leading solution to climate change." Climate change is a shift in weather patterns thought to be caused in part by humans burning fuels, or [global warming \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=global warming\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=global+warming).

He says that is "the No. 1 threat to all eagles and all wildlife." Not wind farms.

There are wind farms in 39 states and Puerto Rico. But, much of the effect of the new rules will be felt in the West, experts say. That's where large-scale wind energy farms are. And that's where many golden eagles live.

## **Re-Evaluated Every Five Years**

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said the changes are good for both wildlife and renewable energy.

"Renewable energy development is vitally important to our nation's future, but it has to be done the right way," she said.

She said the decision will also ensure that "bald and golden eagles continue to thrive for generations."

Under the new regulations, permits will be re-evaluated every five years. At different times, eagle death rates will be looked at. Population levels of the birds and the effectiveness of measures used to reduce deaths will also be checked. Federal officials could require companies to put new conservation measures into place.

And they could suspend or take away the permits.

But the American Bird Conservancy says that the new guidelines are voluntary. Wind farms don't have to pay attention to them. And it said that the government was relying on the companies to say if they've killed eagles.

Michael Hutchins works on wind issues for the bird conservancy. He says "this ruling sets up a system of permitting that allows, for the first time, the legal killing of bald and golden eagles. We think it's a bad idea."

## **Birds And Bats Killed By Wind Farms**

Kelley, of the American Wind Energy Association, said that wind farms hadn't had a big effect on bald eagles. He said that only 2 percent of the golden eagles killed by humans died because of wind farms. In addition, he said, the population of golden eagles in the West is stable or increasing slightly.

Hutchins, however, pointed to a recent study. It estimated that 573,000 birds and 888,000 bats are killed every year by wind farms.

And it could get worse, Hutchins said. "The Obama administration has called for 20 percent of our energy to be generated by renewables by 2030." That's approximately 12 times the amount of power generated now by renewable energy like wind and solar power, he pointed out.

He asked, "If it's not done right, what kind of an impact is that going to have on birds and bats?"

In the mid-20th century, the greatest threat to eagles was chemicals. Pesticides used on crops softened their eggshells and the birds became endangered, Hutchins said. New threats include development around areas where eagles nest and, now, wind power.

"Our basic feeling is, wind energy, yes. But it ought to be done right," Hutchins said. "You can't call it green if it's killing hundreds of thousands of birds and bats annually and if it's killing large numbers of protected eagles."

## Quiz

- 1 Sally Jewell argues for the new rule by saying all the following EXCEPT:
  - (A) saying the new rules will help future eagles to live well
  - (B) saying conservation measures will go into effect
  - (C) saying no bald eagles will be killed
  - (D) saying renewable energy is very important
  
- 2 Select the paragraph from the article that provides the MOST evidence that wind farms have only killed a tiny percentage of the eagle population.
  
- 3 Why will people living in the West be most affected by the new rule?
  - (A) A large number of eagles reside in the West.
  - (B) Wind farms are only located in the western states.
  - (C) The new rule applies only to companies in the West.
  - (D) The government ensures protection of eagles in the West.
  
- 4 The article includes the final paragraphs to:
  - (A) compare the greatest threats to the bald eagle
  - (B) to explain the negative effects of chemicals on bird eggs
  - (C) to convince the reader to fight against renewable energy
  - (D) to describe how complicated the relationship between renewable energy and wildlife is