

Wind Farms Vs. our Eagles

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June 5, 2013

I received the following letters via Email this evening. The story is attributed to the Osage News, but so far, I haven't found it. I'm sure they will stay on top of it, tho. Several months ago, the Minerals Council resolved to make arrangements with the Akin & Gump law firm to handle any new wind farm issues, but I haven't talked to any of them recently about what's being done. I'll keep my good ear to the ground. Lou Brock is a well known and highly respected curator at the Osage Museum

Ray McClain, Osage Shareholder

Wind Developers Request Permit to Kill Bald Eagles story in "Osage News"

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Below is a sad story that I just read, regarding the wind developers requesting a permit to do such a dastardly (pardon my French) deed. I ask, as a member of the Osage Nation, that you, please, deny them such a permit, or let them know that, hopefully, there is no such permit available.

A copy of this letter is being sent to our Osage Nation Congress and Osage Minerals Council.

Sincerely,

Lou Brock

Member, Osage Nation

Wind Developers Request Permit to Kill Bald Eagles in Osage Nation; June 03, 2013

PAWHUSKA, Okla. (June 3, 2013) – The Osage Nation announced today its opposition to a wind developer's intention to kill up to 120 bald eagles during the course of a proposed industrial wind project in Osage territory. Wind Capital Group, a wind development company proposing to build a 94-turbine wind farm between Pawhuska and Ponca City, has applied to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for an "eagle take" permit, which has never been issued to a wind development company in U.S. history.

In November of 2012, the Osage Nation learned that the energy company submitted an application to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for a permit that would allow the company's industrial development project to kill multiple eagles per year. The company is currently awaiting a decision from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on its application to kill eagles.

Osage Nation Principal Chief John D. Red Eagle expressed his deep concern and opposition to killing eagles in Osage territory from a cultural standpoint.

"The eagle is a sacred and symbolic figure to the Osage people, and the area targeted for this project contains a high bald eagle population," Red Eagle said. "While the Osage Nation does not oppose wind energy or alternative energy, we do oppose the specific area for this project. It all comes down to siting projects in appropriate places, and this is not an appropriate place for a massive wind energy project."

The Osage Nation is urging tribal members, conservation groups and other concerned parties to join them in opposing this project and the killing of bald eagles in Osage territory.

"It is our duty to protect the Osage culture, and the eagle is a significant part of that," Red Eagle said. "We refuse to sit back and accept depletion of the population of eagles right here in our homeland."

Given the eagle population in this area and the cultural and religious significance that eagles have in Osage culture, over the past year, the Nation has taken the first steps toward establishing an eagle aviary to care for and rehabilitate injured eagles. The site proposed for the aviary is not far from the proposed energy project.

"The significance of this permit application cannot be overstated," Red Eagle said. "If granted, this would be precedent setting. It should concern all tribes that the federal government is even considering authorizing the killing of eagles on tribal land without the consent of the Osage Nation."

Jacqueline Pata, executive director of the National Congress of American Indians agrees. In a May 3, 2013 letter to the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pata expressed her concerns about the permit.

“To our knowledge, USFWS has never issued an ‘eagle take’ permit for a wind energy project. We believe granting such a permit could set a very harmful and detrimental precedent for tribes and future eagle protection efforts,” Pata stated in the letter.

In addition to the cultural affront that a bald eagle kill permit represents on tribal lands, the Osage Nation’s data on eagle populations in Osage territory illustrates that the wind developers’ permit application contains incomplete data on both the number and location of bald eagles in close proximity to the project’s proposed location.

The Osage Nation Environment and Natural Resources Department (ENR) data on bald eagle populations, locations, and nests near the proposed project site shows that Wind Capital Group failed to consider:

- (1) the eagle population at Kaw Lake, which has Oklahoma’s largest eagle population and is located only seven miles from the project site;
- (2) the National Audubon Society’s most recent eagle count data from the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve; and
- (3) documented eagle flight paths that pass over and near the project site.

According to Jann Jones, Osage Nation ENR Director: “We are very concerned that the lack of complete data in the eagle take application means that the wind project would kill far more eagles than the company says it would.”

Mike Fuhr, State Director for The Nature Conservancy in Oklahoma, also expressed his concerns regarding the proposed location of the project.

“This is just another reason that the site chosen by Wind Capital is a terrible one,” Fuhr said. “The wind siting model developed by The Nature Conservancy, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and a suite of other partners clearly shows that development of wind at this site will have significant negative impacts on greater prairie chickens and other prairie wildlife. This science has been completely ignored.”

For those who would like to voice their concerns on this matter, the Osage Nation is encouraging people to submit their comments via email to Jerry Thompson, Chief of the USFWS Migratory Bird Permits Office, at jerry_e_thompson@fws.gov or by phone at (505) 248-6406.