

Comments on Tule Wind/Energia Sierra Juarez Gen-Tie Projects Draft EIR

Iberdrola or Iberdrola Renewables, which is 80% owned by IBERDROLA, S.A., has produced its Draft Environmental Impact report to San Diego county for the proposed Tule Wind/Energia Sierra Juarez Gen-Tie Projects in the McCain Valley area of East County. I am submitting comments because I have found that this company has a history of submitting Impacts reports that severely down play the most critical impacts of their wind projects.

I am an expert on birds of prey and most of my comments will be related to them. I did however note that the impact report does not discuss potential impacts to two other federally endangered species, the Arroyo toad and the Least Bell's vireo both of which are known to live in the nearby Cleveland National Forest.

Since the project a wind farm the impact report should have discussed the true dangers of a wind farm. What is not in the EIR is that every bird species that is forced to share their habitats with the propeller style wind turbine will eventually be killed by spinning wind turbine blades. The extensive species mortality lists that have been compiled at Altamont and in Europe show this. These mortality lists include peregrine falcons, swallows, and swifts, the fastest and most maneuverable birds on earth. The reason for the mortality is the extreme blade tip speeds that are generated by these turbines. It was not discussed but I calculated the turbines used in the project will have approximately 234 mph tips speeds at 20 RPMs. These blade tip speeds far exceed all the early model turbines installed at Altamont Pass.

I can not stress this enough, all data, surveys and opinions given on behalf of Iberdrola should be viewed with suspicion. I say this because I have encountered major flaws in every report and survey that I have looked at. For example the EIR used in Iberdrola 's PCV (Manzana) Project when commenting on the California Condor stated the following "In addition, no suitable foraging or nesting habitat were identified at the project as a result of more than 5,000 hours of biological surveys conducted at the site". Another condor statement in the final Pdv Mananza EIR stated, "Scientific literature also suggests that diurnal vultures, such as the California condor, are not at substantial risk for collisions with wind turbines". In addition, data on

comparable species, such as turkey vultures, indicate that they skillfully avoid turbines". the report claimed: "As turbines are in an area with high visibility, condors could be expected to be able to avoid collisions with wind turbines at the project site."

In contrast, the reality is that vultures are killed in great numbers each year throughout the world. The PDV document failed to disclose critical information about existing condor habitat in the project site. It was not disclosed that larger mammals (wild pig, elk, deer, cattle) and turkey populations reside in the upper portions of this wind farm site that are food sources for the condor. In actuality condor habitat did exist on the project site.

I recently looked over another survey conducted on behalf of Iberdrola concerning peregrine falcon use in the region of the proposed Groton Wind project in New Hampshire. The official Falcon Survey for the project site shows that researchers did not even observe the falcons when they would be the most active, during courtship in the Spring and during their daily dawn and dusk hunts. Yet the stated objective of the survey was to investigate whether peregrine falcons use the Project area. These observations are critical because it is during these behaviors the falcons are the most likely to be using the project site. It is also during these behaviors that a collision with a turbine is the most likely.

Even the observers themselves noted this flaw in the survey with the following statement; "Therefore, the results of the 2009 surveys can not describe peregrine activity during all daylight hours during the period of interest, or describe activity across the entire Project area."

Yet Iberdrola, in their
Executive Summary for the project, boldly makes the following statement based upon this survey; " Rare, threatened, or endangered bird species that were documented in the Project area during these surveys include peregrine falcon (state- listed threatened), bald eagle (state-listed threatened), and common loon (state- listed threatened). None of these species reside within the project area. No federally-listed threatened or endangered birds were observed during any of the field surveys."

This statement is false. I am an expert on Peregrine Falcon behavior and know with complete certainty these falcons do utilize the air space above the proposed Groton Wind Project site. They will use the project site and will be highly susceptible to turbine blade strikes.

California Condor Discussion in Draft EIR

Having stated the previous examples of flawed information given in Iberdrola impact documents, I will now point out misrepresentations concerning the California Condor. In the Tule Wind/Energia Sierra Juarez Gen-Tie Projects EIR is this carefully worded assessment: "The California condor is a federally and state-listed endangered species and is also Fully Protected. This species has been reintroduced to a number of locations within North America as described in Section D.2.1. Although the closest area used by the Baja-released condors is approximately 50 miles south of the Tule Wind Project, a female condor did fly from Baja over the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park area. The bird did not remain in the United States for more than a couple of days. However, this indicates that these birds could fly the distance to the project area. Although the habitat in the project area is suitable for a condor to forage within, there are no roosting or nesting opportunities, and nesting locations within the Sierra San Pedro de Martir National Park are approximately 100 miles south of the project area."

There are many things wrong with this statement. (1) Condors can very easily fly, glide, and soar on wind currents more than 100 miles in a day. (2) Other condors could have flown to the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park area, but only one has been reported. (3) The area has suitable foraging habitat so the truth is, condors will always be drawn to the area. (4) It is claimed there are no roosting locations for the condor in the project area. Condors can and will use many of the same perches and rim rocks used by the 10 pairs of Golden Eagles reported living in the area. (5) It is also not disclosed that once the project is built there will be hundreds of new perches and roosting sites for condors and all birds of prey. These will be provided by the 60-200 foot towers and poles used for the project.

Here is another carefully worded and misleading statement from the EIR: "Within the Proposed PROJECT area, suitable foraging habitat includes agriculture, disturbed habitat, field/pasture, and non-native grassland, but this species is not likely to occur within San Diego County since the closest potential breeding population is located in Baja California, Mexico, as noted previously. The species could occasionally wander north from Baja, but breeding of the species in San Diego County has not been recorded since the 1880s (Unitt 2004)."

The fact that the condor will be moving north from Baja must be considered. I firmly believe the Condor will attempt to again nest in San Diego County and at the very least migrate through on a regular basis once the Baja Condor population gets established. San Diego County must understand that the Tule Wind/Energia Sierra Juarez Gen-Tie Projects will have a very serious impact

upon critically endangered condor.

The lethal propeller style wind turbines used in the project will prove to be a major road block in the condor recovery plans of the USFWS, the CDFG, and all involved in the recovery effort. The recovery plan for the condor calls for the free flying condors to the north of San Diego county, to eventually intermingle and breed with the southern BAJA population. This project will stop the free movement of the highly susceptible condors and keep them from getting established in eastern San Diego County. As a result the condor populations will forever be limited to the immediate areas around their feeding stations. In addition if the isolated Baja population expands or if individuals wants to extend their forage range, Condors can only move to the north towards San Diego County because of limited suitable habitat available in Baja. I have spent a considerable amount of time in the Baja habitat looking doing research in the 1970 's and saw first hand how ill suited most of the habitat is for the condor.

It is my opinion that most of the habitat in Baja will not support any Condors. In a 1980 article written by Sanford R. Wilbur and Lloyd F. Kiff, they came to the same conclusion. It is titled "**The California Condor in Baja California, Mexico**". Here is what they had to say about the harsh Baja habitat and condors:

1. "There is very little suitable habitat.--Although there are thousands of square miles of relatively uninhabited terrain in northern Baja California, much of it is desert. The region has never fully recovered from the drought of the 1930s. Native mammals are scarce, and livestock grazing is localized. Condors, particularly nesting birds not free to forage great distances, would have great difficulty finding food regularly. There is no other area in Baja California comparable to the Sierra San Pedro Martir, the location of most historical condor sightings. The Sierra Juarez, for example, lacks the high mountain meadows with seasonally large numbers of cattle. The coastal mountains have potential nesting sites, but little food.

2. There is little likelihood of vagrant birds coming from California.--Very few California Condors have been reported south of Los Angeles since 1910 (Koford

1953). There are no confirmed records since before 1966 (Wilbur 1978) While a condor has the capability of soaring great distances, and they do sometimes appear in unexpected places, in general they are traditional and predictable in their movements. For a California bird to appear in Baja California would require a minimum flight of more than 300 miles, in a non-traditional direction, and over considerable terrain that we think would have little or no attraction for a condor.

Wind Farm Transparency

It is well known that wind turbines cause bird and bat mortality however the total magnitude of this impact cannot ever be fully understood until there is complete transparency. This information is made even more difficult to obtain when the access the wind properties is limited by the industry itself. Keep in mind wind farms have been known to conceal blade strike victims as in Spain where the bodies of 19 unreported griffon vultures were found buried on wind farm property. I have also been told that contracts and leases have gag clauses written into them so information can be limited.

To insure transparency all wind farms should be required to operate with specific conditions. Every wind farm should be subject to inspection at any time by non-industry biologists and the unreported disposal or hiding of bodies treated as a felony with corresponding fines. The use of 24 hour video camera/web cams with feeds to an accessible internet site should be required of any and all turbines in high priority habitats. Each wind farm should also be set up with mandatory mortality thresholds and shut down if these thresholds are met.

I hope San Diego County understands that their decisions about this project will greatly impact the future of the condor. It is my recommendation that based upon the impacts to the condor and this company's history of using deceptive wording and omissions describing their Biological Impact Reports, that San Diego County should deny the project.

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