

End the wind PTC and stop subsidizing the slaughter!

Terminate Big Wind's Production Tax Credit to save eagles, bats, whooping cranes – and jobs
COMMENTS to the House Ways and Means Committee, Energy Tax Reform Working Group
Paul Driessen, CFACT

Congress and the White House are still struggling to find subsidy or entitlement programs that they are willing to cut. Meanwhile, the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) and individual wind turbine operators insist that the 2.2-cents per kilowatt-hour Production Tax Credit (PTC) for wind electricity must be preserved yet again – and then (perhaps partially) phased out over the next five years. With a combined subsidy and PTC price tag of [\\$12 billion in 2013](#), this policy is an unsustainable disaster.

The PTC should be terminated immediately, and any further expansion of wind power halted. Not just for debt, budgetary and economic reasons, but for moral and environmental reasons:

Wind turbines disrupt and destroy wildlife habitats. They butcher birds and bats that are vital to ecological diversity, agriculture, and human health and welfare.

It is vital that Congress and American taxpayers stop subsidizing the slaughter!

The US Fish and Wildlife Service and American Bird Conservancy say wind turbines [kill 440,000 bald and golden eagles](#), hawks, falcons, owls, cranes, egrets, geese and other birds every year in the United States. Turbines also eradicate countless night-flying, insect-eating bats. These numbers are appalling enough.

However, more recent, more accurate studies reveal that these estimates are frightfully low, and based on misleading or even fraudulent data. The horrific reality is that, in the United States alone, supposedly “sustainable” and “eco-friendly” wind turbines are killing an estimated

13,000,000 to 39,000,000 birds and bats every year!

These shocking figures reflect the presence of well over 39,000 turbines in the United States, many located in habitats with large numbers and species of raptors, other birds and bats, says Mark Duchamp, president of [Save the Eagles International](#) and chairman of the [World Council for Nature](#). His estimates are based on a 2012 study by the [Spanish Ornithological Society](#) (SEO/Birdlife), which utilized data from 136 official turbine monitoring studies from Spain, and is corroborated by a 1993 study of [bird mortality](#) from wind turbines in Germany and Sweden, Duchamp explains.

Those studies concluded that each wind turbine, on average, kills 333-1,000 birds and bats annually in Spain, up to 309 birds per year in Germany, and as many as 895 birds and bats in Sweden. Duchamp estimates that turbines kill twice as many bats as birds. There is no reason whatsoever to suppose that US turbines are any less lethal to birds and bats.

These figures cover only flying creatures that are [struck and killed](#) or [mortally wounded](#) by turbines, whose blade tips move at 100-200 mph. Over the past 25 years, [2,300 golden eagles](#) have been killed by turbines just at Altamont Pass, California, Dr. Shawn Smallwood estimates. The subsidized slaughter “could easily be over 500” golden eagles a year in our western states, [Save the Eagles International](#) biologist Jim Wiegand fears, plus many bald eagles. Entire flocks of geese can blunder into turbines and get killed.

These are not [sparrows and pigeons](#) killed by house cats. They are our most vital and magnificent species.

In the 86-square-mile area blanketed by the Altamont wind facility, no eagles have nested for over 20 years, and golden eagle nest sites have declined by half near the facility, even though both areas are prime habitat, says Wiegand. Overall, there has been an 80% population decline for the golden eagle in Southern California, he notes. Since wind turbines began proliferating, there has been a 47% loss of raptors in Oregon, the USFWS states, and a 42% decline in bird populations in Iowa, according to an Iowa Department of Natural Resources researcher.

After being nursed back from the brink of extinction, magnificent five-foot-tall whooping cranes now face annihilation, due to thousands of turbines being erected within their 200-mile-wide, 2,500-mile-long migration routes, former FWS whooping crane coordinator [Tom Stehn worries](#). From their small population, over 200 cranes have “gone missing” in recent years, and in 2012 Fish and Wildlife deceitfully delayed its “whooper” count until after Congress voted on the PTC.

The FWS also changed its survey methods, from a complete census with a 2% margin of error – to a “distance sampling method” that injects a 25% error margin that Stehn says is “unacceptable and useless for species recovery management.” (But the new methods are very helpful for hiding wind turbine kills, says Wiegand.)

These actions are an integral part of the corrupt practices, disinformation and double standards engaged in by politicians, government agencies and environmental groups to support Big Wind: outrage, intolerance and penalties for fossil fuels – subsidies, favoritism and [exemptions from laws and regulations](#) for wind.

The Interior Department has used [sage grouse](#) and lesser prairie chickens to justify prohibitions on oil leasing and drilling, and [prosecuted oil companies](#) for unintentional deaths of 28 mallard ducks in North Dakota – but it has never penalized a single wind turbine company for eco-slaughter. Now DOI’s Fish and Wildlife Service wants to issue “[programmatic take permits](#)” that would allow wind turbine operators to repeatedly, systematically, legally and “inadvertently” injure, maim and kill eagles, cranes and condors.

Possess a feather from an eagle killed by a wind turbine, trap a bat in your attic or smash a goose egg – and the [penalties are swift and severe](#). But kill eagles, bats, geese or whooping cranes with a wind turbine, and not only is there no penalty from the FWS and no outrage from the Sierra Club; there are more subsidies and tax credits from Congress, and more exemptions from the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, NEPA/EIS studies, and other laws. This cannot be allowed to continue.

Interior and the FWS also let monitoring ornithologists search for dead birds only within 130-165 feet from gigantic turbine towers – thus missing numerous birds that were flung further by the impact or limped off to die elsewhere – and to search for carcasses only every few weeks, allowing scavengers to take most of them away. In addition, wind facility crews remove and bury carcasses illegally, say Wiegand, Duchamp and the [Spanish Ornithological Society](#). The FWS has never prosecuted that either.

Wildlife officials also let operators treat data as proprietary trade secrets, safeguarded under nondisclosure agreements or put into private data banks immune from FOIA requests; impose high security at turbine sites to make accurate, honest, independent mortality counts impossible; and filter, massage and manipulate data to make mortality appear minimal.

No other American industry is allowed to operate with such immunity and impunity. It is time to end the wind Production Tax Credit and the blatant favoritism and exemptions for the wind power industry. Big Wind must be held to the same standards, laws and regulations that apply to all other industries.

Industrial wind operators must be required to permit access by unbiased outside experts to their facilities, to ensure compliance with the law and facilitate regular, full, independent bird and bat mortality counts. They must be required to comply with all endangered species, migratory bird and other environmental laws.

Instead of extending the wind PTC, Congress should demand an accurate and verifiable 2013 winter count for the whooping cranes, along with complete age class figures – and prohibit the Fish and Wildlife Service from implementing any programmatic take permit system for eagles, whooping cranes or other birds. It should also demand a multi-year, independent, transparent study of bird and bat mortality, at every wind facility in America, before allowing another turbine facility to be built in the United States.

From an additional ecological standpoint, wind is [our least sustainable energy option](#). Industrial wind projects require huge swaths of land, often in pristine area, for turbines, access roads and ultra-long transmission lines to connect windy areas to distant urban electricity consumers. Turbines and transmission towers require enormous quantities of steel, concrete, rare earth metals, copper, unrecyclable fiberglass and other materials – more than conventional power plants that generate 97% of US electricity. It makes far more sense to build conventional power plants, and forget about wind power.

Moreover, wind energy is a net jobs and economic *loser*. By raising electricity costs for factories, internet hubs, offices, malls, hospitals, school districts and other businesses, industrial wind power kills [two to four jobs](#) for [every wind job](#) created through government mandates, subsidies and tax credits – which themselves extract billions of dollars from productive sectors of the economy, to support Big Wind. Its impact on the budgets, health and well-being of people on low and fixed incomes is equally damaging.

Wind energy will never be competitive with alternative electricity sources, especially with [the shale gas revolution](#) driving the price of natural gas down to \$3 per thousand cubic feet to power high-efficiency combined-cycle generators. [Intermittent, unreliable](#) wind power is parasitic, entirely dependent on fossil fuel generators to provide electricity every time the wind is low or nonexistent. Finally, for those worried about “dangerous global warming,” wind energy does almost nothing to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Extending the wind energy Production Tax Credit yet again, allowing current Fish and Wildlife Service practices to continue – or worse, permitting Big Wind to expand to generate 25% of US electricity – would be a catastrophe of monumental proportions.

Millions more birds and bats will die, and entire species will disappear from habitats, geographic regions and throughout the Lower 48 United States.

Any additional extension of the wind energy Production Tax Credit would constitute an unsustainable, ecologically devastating public policy. It is essential that Congress correct this harmful policy – and save America’s rare, threatened, endangered and ecologically vital birds and bats.

Paul Driessen is senior policy advisor for the Committee For A Constructive Tomorrow (www.CFACT.org) and author of *Eco-Imperialism: Green power - Black death*.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul K. Driessen