



WILD VIRGINIA

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Wild Virginia Position Paper: WIND ENERGY

June 23, 2007

Wild Virginia recognizes the need to shift to renewable energy sources for producing electricity in the United States. The environmental benefits of moving away from fossil fuels, nuclear power and other common sources of generating electricity are numerous and significant. We support many of the efforts now in place to make such a shift. In fact, Wild Virginia joined many other organizations in signing the Renewable Electricity Statement of Principles that was sent to all members of U.S. Congress in June, 2007. The statement calls for renewable sources of energy to produce 20 percent of the nation's electricity by 2020.

Wind energy should, and hopefully will be a major component of America's renewable energy portfolio. As with almost any large scale development, great care should be taken in the planning process before projects are undertaken. This is true of potential wind energy development in high elevation areas of the Appalachian Mountains generally, and the George Washington National Forest in particular.

The need for caution is due to the number of uncertainties and potential environmental problems associated with wind farms and large turbines. Some of these include:

- Impacts to birds. Very little reliable data exists on how much direct mortality may occur (i.e., collisions between flying birds and the turbine blades) and the effects on bird populations. The ridge lines (where the turbines would be sited) often serve as flight paths for migratory birds.
- Impacts to bats. Even less is known about potential impacts to bats than is known for birds.
- Forest loss and fragmentation. The presence of turbine sites, transmission line corridors, and access roads results in the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of forest habitat. Given the often harsh environmental conditions along mountain ridgelines, these forest communities may be more sensitive to disturbance.

There are also concerns beyond environmental ones. Some of these are:

- Privatization of public resources. The concept of private developers using public lands for personal gain is objectionable to many citizens. Wild Virginia generally opposes the idea in the absence of a compelling need for it. Private lands should be the site for private developments.
- Practical and logistical issues. Questions have been raised about the utility of building wind farms in the Appalachians. Coastlines and other areas closer to population centers that have already been compromised with significant human activity and are closer to high voltage power lines are preferable. They are also where the need and demand for electricity is greater.

A wind energy project, like any industrial scale development on public lands, must be fully reviewed under the National Environmental Policy Act. Each wind energy project is unique and must be considered on its merits on a case-by-case basis. All of the issues listed above must be fully addressed. In addition, some areas of the George Washington National Forest should be off limits to wind energy development projects entirely. These are Wilderness areas, Roadless Areas, Special Biological Areas, and drinking watersheds. Wild Virginia supports renewable energy production and a shift away from fossil fuels and nuclear power. Wind power is an important part of that shift.