

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

500 Lafayette Road • St. Paul, MN • 55155-40



May 16, 2011

Burl Haar, Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place E., Suite 350
Saint Paul, MN 55101-2147

Re: Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) Report for the AWA Goodhue Wind Project
[PUC Docket Number IP-6701/WS-08-1233]

Dear Mr. Haar:

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has reviewed the April 29, 2011 filing of the Administrative Law Judge's Findings of Fact, Conclusions and Recommendation for the Goodhue Wind Project and provides the following input specific to Findings 128 and 129.

Finding 128 states the following: "There is no evidence that wetlands require a setback of this magnitude to protect the environment." The magnitude referred to is likely the 5 rotor diameter distance discussed in Finding 127. This section of the report also discusses turbine distances of 1000 feet and 3 rotor diameters and Finding 128 may also refer to those distances. Though available information regarding turbine setbacks from wetlands is preliminary and at times based upon studies that are older, the statement that there is "no evidence" regarding these sizes of turbine setbacks may be misleading. A report from the Buffalo Ridge studies, conducted in Minnesota, stated that "Turbines with avian mortality were significantly ($p=0.05$) closer to wetlands (436 m [1430.45 feet]) than turbines without avian mortality (594 m [1948.82 feet]) (Johnson, 2000)." Also, the Handbook of Inventory Methods and Standard Protocols for Surveying Bats in Alberta recommended that, ideally, turbines should be positioned in open, flat areas at least 500 meters (1640.42 feet) from bodies of water, riparian habitats, and forest edges (Vonhoff, 2002). The California Bat Working Group recommended that projects should avoid placing turbines within 500 meters (1640.42 feet) of still flowing water bodies, riparian and forest edges and known hibernacula (California Bat Working Group, 2006). Also, the topic of wetland buffers from various types of infrastructure other than turbines is widely researched.

When considering available information, please note that Buffalo Ridge studies were conducted in one region of Minnesota and researched older turbine technology. Also, estimates of appropriate turbine setbacks available in literature are somewhat preliminary. However, it is important to consider that there is information available to suggest that further discussion of wind farm infrastructure and appropriate distances to wetlands would be useful in project planning. The DNR looks forward to participating with the Department of Commerce and Public Utilities Commission in continued analysis of existing and future research regarding this topic.

Finding 129 states: "The types of wetlands that are typical in the project construction area are not good habitats for birds." This statement is likely too broad of a summary for an area the size of a wind project with multiple types of wetlands. One reviewing the report should consider this finding with caution. It is likely that in a predominantly agricultural area, some wetlands would be affected by farming and may provide lower quality habitat than others. However, even lower quality wetlands may provide important habitat. For example, flocks of migratory birds often use seasonally flooded wetlands in cropped lands as important migratory stopover locations.



Thank-you for your consideration of DNR input regarding the Goodhue Wind Project. Thank-you also for your consideration of previous comment letters regarding the Goodhue Wind Project as project summaries are prepared for PUC permit decisions. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Jamie Schrenzel
Principal Planner
Environmental Review Unit
(651) 259-5115

C: Judge Kathleen D. Sheehy, OAH
Larry Hartman, DOC
Richard Davis, USFWS
Melissa Doperalski, DNR

References:

California Bat Working Group. 2006. Guidelines For Assessing And Minimizing Impacts To Bats At Wind Energy Development Sites In California. 20 pp.

Johnson, G.D., W.P. Erickson, M.D. Strickland, M.F. Shepherd, and D.A. Shepherd. 2000. Final Report: Avian Monitoring Studies At The Buffalo Ridge, Minnesota Wind Resource Area: Results Of A 4-Year Study. Western EcoSystems Technology, Inc.

Vonhoff, M. 2002. Handbook of Inventory Methods and Standard Protocols for Surveying Bats in Alberta. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division, Edmonton, Alberta. Revised 2005.