

NATIONAL REVIEW

‘Green’ Energy Kills Eagles

By Robert Bryce — December 9, 2013

We have to kill eagles in order to save them.

That’s now the official policy of the U.S. Interior Department. On Friday, the agency announced that it would grant some wind-energy companies permits that will allow them to kill or injure bald and golden eagles for up to 30 years without penalty.

The move is an unprecedented gift to the wind-energy industry, which has been lobbying for the 30-year permit for several years. Shortly after the deal was announced, the wind-energy lobby issued a statement that would make George Orwell proud. An official with the American Wind Energy Association declared that this “is not a program to kill eagles.” It is, he claimed, “about conservation.”

Well then. We can now rest easy. Big Wind is saving eagles by getting permits to kill them.

Dozens of environmental groups, including the American Bird Conservancy, the Conservation Law Center, and the National Audubon Society, opposed the deal. Under the headline “Interior Dept. Rule Greenlights Eagle Slaughter at Wind Farms,” Audubon issued a statement calling it “a stunningly bad move” and quoting the group’s president and CEO, David Yarnold: “Instead of balancing the need for conservation and renewable energy, Interior wrote the wind industry a [blank check](#).” He called it “outrageous” that “the government is sanctioning the killing of America’s symbol, the Bald Eagle.”

Another group, the San Diego–based Protect Our Communities Foundation, said it remains opposed to the new permit program “because it would harm eagles, has not been adequately studied, and violates federal law.” Kelly Fuller, a consultant working for the group, told me that the permit deal “is a gift to the wind industry and a disaster for eagles and the people who care about eagles.” She said the big question now is which environmental groups will take the lead in suing the Interior Department.

There are many stunning facets to this development. Among the most obvious: It was just two weeks ago that the Justice Department finally began enforcing federal wildlife laws against the wind industry. On November 22, Justice announced that it had reached a \$1 million settlement with the owner of two Wyoming wind projects that had killed protected birds.

The plea deal, with Duke Energy, marks the first time that the federal government has enforced the Migratory Bird Treaty Act against the wind industry. By bringing criminal charges against Duke — for killing 14 golden eagles and 149 other protected birds — the Justice Department ended the double standard on enforcement of the act. Over the past few decades, federal authorities have brought hundreds of cases against the oil-and-gas sector for killing migratory birds, while the wind industry has enjoyed a de facto exemption. Then, just days after finally bringing one member of the wind industry to justice, the Obama administration appears ready to give away the store.

Want more outrage? The federal government wants to give decades-long permits allowing the wind industry to kill the bird that has been our national symbol since 1782. Never mind that the Continental Congress spent nearly six years haggling over the design for the Great Seal of the United States before finally settling on the one we now have.

Never mind that the bald eagle has been a protected species under federal law since 1940. The golden eagle gained similar protection in 1962.

Never mind that, under the Endangered Species Act, the bald eagle [was protected](#) from 1976 to 2007. It finally graduated from the federally protected list — it's among only a handful of species ever to do so — thanks only to the investment of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars in conservation efforts, including captive-breeding projects. Some of those efforts were sponsored by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Never mind the symbolism of the bald eagle or its history. The wind industry, which already enjoys lucrative subsidies and, in many states, mandates, has declared itself “green.” And the Obama administration, in its enthusiasm for all things environmental, gave Big Wind what it wanted.

If you want to get madder still, consider this: On September 11, some of the top raptor biologists at the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a report that found that the number of documented eagle kills by wind turbines has increased dramatically over the past few years, rising from two in 2007 to 24 in 2011. In all, some 85 eagles have been killed by wind turbines since 1997. And that figure is “an absolute minimum,” Joel Pagel, the lead author of the report, recently told me. Among the carcasses: six bald eagles.

In an interview shortly after the publication of his findings in the *Journal of Raptor Research*, Pagel told me that he and his colleagues have since documented additional eagle kills by wind turbines in Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and North Dakota. He refused to give a number but said “it's quite a few.” There are now 14 states where the problem has been identified, he said, adding that more than half of the eagle carcasses have been found “incidentally” — that is, by people not out looking for them. And so the total of dead eagles is likely far higher than what Pagel and his colleagues are reporting.

Want yet more more outrage? Back in April, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a report saying flatly that “there are [no conservation measures](#) that have been scientifically shown to reduce eagle disturbance and blade-strike mortality at wind projects.” That is, the more turbines we build, the more eagles are killed. The gift to the wind industry followed only months after this report.

But the biggest outrage of all — and yes, I know there are plenty to choose from — is the claim by both the federal government and Big Wind that adding more wind turbines will have some salutary effect on climate change.

In its press release, the Interior Department maintains that the new permits will “help the renewable energy industry,” which, says Secretary Sally Jewell, is “[vitally important](#) to our nation's future.” Why it's “vitally important” wasn't spelled out; undoubtedly the underlying rationale relates to the issue of climate change.

For its part, the American Wind Energy Association in its press release once again repeated Big Wind's Big Lie, calling wind energy “one of the cheapest, fastest, most readily scalable ways available now to address climate change.”

A bigger fib is hard to conjure.

As I [wrote](#) in these pages last month, wind turbines are nothing more than climate-change scarecrows. If we accept Big Wind's claim that all U.S. wind turbines (whose total capacity is about 60,000 megawatts) are cutting carbon dioxide emissions by [80 million tons per year](#), then domestic wind energy is reducing global carbon dioxide emissions by a whopping two-tenths of 1 percent. That's a burp in a hurricane.

The math is fourth-grade simple. Global carbon dioxide emissions are now about 34.5 billion tons per year. Since 1982, those emissions have been increasing by an average of about 500 million tons per year. Therefore, if we wanted to merely halt the rate of growth in global carbon dioxide emissions by using wind energy alone — and remember, this won't displace any of the existing need for coal, oil, and natural gas — we would have to install about 375,000 megawatts of new wind-energy capacity *every year*. That much wind capacity would require setting aside a land area the size of Germany *every year*. The foolishness of such a scheme is readily apparent, and all the more so in light of the global backlash against the wind industry, from Australia to Wisconsin.

And to add one more dash of craziness to the insanity: The American Wind Energy Association is lobbying for an extension of the production tax credit, the 2.3-cent-per-kilowatt-hour subsidy given to wind-energy generators. A one-year extension of that subsidy will [cost taxpayers](#) \$6.1 billion.

In short, the Obama administration wants to allow Big Wind to kill eagles even though one species, the bald eagle, our national symbol, spent three decades on the endangered-species list. This move comes after federal biologists have documented that the eagle-kill problem is increasing, and after the Fish and Wildlife Service itself has found no proven conservation measures that could reduce bird kills at wind projects.

Big Wind may be allowed to legally kill eagles for decades to come while doing effectively nothing to reduce carbon dioxide emissions or address climate change. Big Wind wants subsidies while it does so. And all of this is happening because no one — and I mean no one — on the green Left or in the Obama administration dares to do the math.

— *Robert Bryce is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. His fifth book, Smaller Faster Lighter Denser Cheaper: How Innovation Keeps Proving the Catastrophists Wrong, will be published in May.*

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