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Audubon Society Chapters, California Attorney General and Wind Companies Reach Agreement on Altamont Pass

Old wind turbines to be replaced with new turbines that are safer for birds

(Berkeley, California, December 6, 2010) In cooperation with the California Attorney General's Office, five Bay Area Audubon Society chapters and Californians for Renewable Energy (CaRE) have reached an agreement with wind energy operators owned by NextEra Energy Resources, LLC, to expedite the replacement of old wind turbines in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area with new, larger wind turbines that are less likely to harm birds.

Golden Gate Audubon, Santa Clara Valley Audubon, Mt. Diablo Audubon, Ohlone Audubon, and Marin Audubon joined the Attorney General's Office in negotiating an agreement that addresses the state's need for renewable wind energy and the state's obligation to protect resident and migratory birds.

"Our agreement sets an aggressive schedule for removing the old-generation turbines and replacing them with new-generation turbines that should substantially reduce impacts to birds," said Michael Lynes, Conservation Director with the Golden Gate Audubon Society. "According to experts studying the Altamont Pass, the removal of the old turbines and replacement with properly-sited turbines may reduce impacts to birds by as much as 80%."

Altamont Pass was heavily developed for wind power generation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, eventually including more than 5800 turbines covering a 56 mi² area in eastern Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. These lands at one time provided ample habitat for birds and still serves as an important migratory corridor for Golden Eagles and other raptors. For much of the last decade, the Bay Area Audubon chapters and the operating wind companies have struggled to agree on ways to reduce impacts to birds, bats and other wildlife while fostering the environmental and economic benefits of wind energy generation in the Altamont Pass.

The new agreement reflects the consensus of the Alameda County Scientific Review Committee that the only way to significantly reduce impacts to birds and keep wind energy generation in Altamont Pass is to remove the old-generation wind turbines and replace them with better sited, new-generation models. And, regardless of whether the NextEra Energy Resources companies replace all of their turbines on this expedited schedule, they have committed to ceasing all operations of their old turbines by the end of 2015, three years before they are required to do so under their current permits.

"This agreement addresses the problem arising throughout the state: balancing the need for renewable energy generation with subsequent impacts to wildlife," said Bob Power, Executive Director of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. "We appreciate NextEra leading the way in the Altamont Pass to remove the old turbines and properly install new ones that should significantly reduce risks to birds. We are also mindful that impacts to wildlife will continue and the Audubon chapters will remain engaged in conservation planning and advocacy on behalf of birds and other wildlife in the Altamont Pass and throughout the Bay Area."

Golden Gate Audubon Society, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Marin Audubon Society, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, and Ohlone Audubon Society are independent nonprofit organizations dedicated to protecting birds, other wildlife, and their natural habitats. They conserve and restore wildlife habitats, connect people of all ages and backgrounds with the natural world, and educate and engage Bay Area residents in the protection of our shared, local environment.

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