

Seasonal shutdown of Altamont Pass windfarms proposed to save birds

A group of wind energy producers says one way to curtail bird deaths in the vast windmill farms in the Altamont Pass between the Bay Area and the San Joaquin Valley would be to shut down the giant machines during parts of the year.

"The turbine owners are concerned about the avian issues in the Altamont and we are committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders on this issue," says Bryan Fennell, vice president of business management for FPL Energy, representing the Altamont wind power companies, in a written statement.

The turbine owners proposed Thursday that they would turn off half of Altamont's more than 5000 turbines during November and December, alternating with the second half being shut down during January and February.

The goal is to reduce by 35 percent over three years the number of raptor-type birds which are killed when they fly into the spinning blades or are electrocuted by power lines.

The windmill owners also propose permanent relocation or shutdown of approximately 100 of the highest risk turbines; retrofitting power poles to prevent bird electrocutions and removal of derelict turbines, towers and overhead lines.

"The measures to be implemented under the plan ... will help reduce avian mortality significantly in the near term, while contributing to clean, economical wind power production over the long term," says James Walker, CEO of enXco, another of the power generators, in a written statement.

The Altamont Pass turbine farms experience higher raptor mortality rates than any other wind project area in the U.S. The [Center for Biological Diversity](#), which sued the power generators in November 2004 over the bird kills, says between 880 and 1,330 golden eagles, hawks, owls and other protected raptors have been killed each year for the past 20 years by the power generating facilities in the Altamont Pass, in violation of California Fish and Game Code provisions as well as the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

A study published by the [California Energy Commission](#) in 2004 supports replacing the older wind turbines prevalent in the Altamont area with modern wind turbine technology less dangerous to birds, the owners' group says. The process of replacing older wind turbines with modern ones, known as "repowering," is considered the principle long term solution to reducing avian mortality in the Altamont.

The energy commission earlier rejected a generator-proposed mitigation plan as too small in scope and without clearly stated objectives.

The companies involved in the plan announced Thursday are [FPL Energy, LLC](#), a unit of FPL Group, Inc. (NYSE: FPL) of Juno Beach, Fla.; [Global Renewable Energy Partners Inc.](#), of La Jolla; enXco Inc., of North Palm Springs, an affiliate of EdF Energies Nouvelles of France, and [Altamont Winds Inc.](#), an affiliate of [Pacific Winds Inc.](#), of Tracy.