

## Vermont Public Radio - vpr.net

[http://www.vpr.net/news\\_detail/83266/](http://www.vpr.net/news_detail/83266/)

### News VPR News

#### Wind project raises concern over black bears

Tuesday December 16, 2008

John Dillon

Montpelier, Vt.



(Host) Two federal agencies have raised concerns that a major wind project planned for southern Vermont could harm black bears. The agencies suggest that the project could be scaled back so that critical wildlife habitat is not destroyed.

VPR's John Dillon reports:

(Dillon) The Deerfield Wind project is the first to be proposed for a national forest, so it's being closely watched by wind developers and environmentalists.

The developers want to build 17 turbines on two ridgelines in the Green Mountain National Forest near Searsburg. But the state's leading bear biologist project has said the western section of the development could destroy some of the state's most important bear habitat.

Now the federal Fish and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency have raised similar concerns.

Vernon Lang is with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

(Lang) "We're not thrilled with the proposal to ... fragment that western project area from the standpoint of bears or birds, either one."

(Dillon) The project needs approval from both the U-S Forest Service and the state Public Service Board. Lang says the Forest Service hasn't looked at alternative sites that could have less impact on wildlife.

(Lang) "Our thought was after reading the document was that was a fatal flaw. Previously when the Forest Service was doing the management plan for the forest they had identified areas, 30 some odd sites on the forests that were potentially suitable for wind power development."

(Dillon) The Environmental Protection Agency also raised concerns that the project as designed could damage critical bear habitat. The EPA said one solution would be for the developer to scale back the proposal to reduce the impact on the area used by bears.

Meanwhile, some environmental groups are questioning the wind project as well.

Molly Matteson is with the Northeast field office of the Center for Biological Diversity. She says the country needs to cut its dependence on fossil fuels. But she says the environmental impacts of renewable energy developments should not be ignored. Her organization has cited the bear issue, as well as the potential impacts on a roadless area of the national forest.

(Matteson) "Also from a policy perspective the fact that this is the first wind energy project on any national forest in the country is really crucial. And given the fact that we are very likely to see more proposals for renewable energy on public lands it's very important to get this one right."

(Dillon) The project developer, Deerfield Wind, is likely to resist calls to scale back the proposal.

A spokesman for Deerfield was not available for comment on tape. But the company has challenged the state on the bear issue. A company official says Deerfield has prepared a detailed economic analysis that shows a smaller project does not make financial sense.

For VPR News, I'm John Dillon in Montpelier.