



Press Release

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Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office's Wildlife and Habitat Risk Map for Land-Based Wind Energy

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As Puerto Rico shifts to renewable energy production to decrease the need for carbon-based fuel, wind energy will be an alternative source of power. The U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) on March 23, 2012 issued the Land-Based Wind Energy Guidelines. These voluntary guidelines help shape the smart siting, design and operation of the growing wind energy economy. They are formulated to minimize environmental risk due to wind energy development. Environmental risks include direct impacts to wildlife such as collisions with turbines and associated infrastructure, loss or degradation of habitat from turbines and infrastructure, fragmentation of habitat, displacement or behavioral changes, and indirect impacts like increased predator populations. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) considers species of concern to be those that are rare, threatened or endangered, along with migratory birds, and bats.

Today, the Service's Caribbean Ecological Service Field Office in collaboration with the Caribbean Landscape Conservation Cooperative (CLCC) and the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (PRDNER) is releasing an island-wide map showing relative risk to species of concern and sensitive habitats that can be associated with potential wind energy projects in Puerto Rico. The map depicts the Service's estimation of areas of potentially low, moderate or high environmental risk to species of concern and sensitive habitats. It also depicts managed conservation areas and federally-owned protected lands on the island of Puerto Rico.

"With this map, we are making it easier for wind project developers to implement the voluntary Land-Based Wind Energy Guidelines that were issued by the DOI. Our aim is to give access to accurate, reliable and consistent information about wildlife, specifically species of concern and sensitive habitats. This map is a tool to enhance cooperation between the public and private sector through the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS)", said Edwin E. Muñoz, Field Supervisor for the Caribbean ES Field Office.

The map serves to inform and guide a developer's siting decision during early stages of project planning. By providing information on areas with species of concern and sensitive habitats, the map allows the developer to predict a general level of effort for site assessment and characterization before initiating the Service to review. Regardless of the level of environmental risk associated with a particular area, the Service recommends baseline studies that ensure minimal impact of species of concern and sensitive habitats. If initial evaluations reveal potential impacts to sensitive habitats or species of concern, further evaluations and studies would be recommended.

Dr. Brent Murry, Science Coordinator for the Caribbean Landscape Conservation Cooperative, comments on the implications and potential of this map, "This map represents a proactive effort on the part of the US FWS Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office by providing recommendations to potential wind development projects. If managed and developed wisely, the use of wind energy is an important response to climate change and can help provide better energy security to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. The map also serves to keep wildlife and habitat conservation at the forefront of the alternative energy development discussion. The CLCC mission is to help develop and deliver the best available conservation science and strategies to respond to climate change, and we feel this map can help inform the important discussion of balancing energy production with maintaining natural resources and environmental heritage. It is my hope that this new map serves as a basis for further multi-organizational efforts to provide transparent information on resources and vulnerabilities that allow for balancing socio-economic factors, such as agricultural and food security, forest products, and cultural, social, and historic resources in conservation planning."

If you have any questions about the map, please contact Felix Lopez at felix_lopez@fws.gov.

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