
Executive Summary

This *Proposed Habitat Conservation Plan and Incidental Take Permit for the Indiana Bat (Myotis sodalis) for the Buckeye Wind Power Project Champaign County, Ohio* Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) evaluates the effects of issuing an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for activities associated with the proposed Buckeye Wind Power Project (Project). This DEIS describes the components and potential impacts of three construction and operational alternatives for the proposed wind power facility. The Project would occupy approximately 32,395 hectares (ha; 80,051 acres [ac]) in portions of Union, Wayne, Urbana, Salem, Rush, and Goshen Townships in Champaign County in west central Ohio (Action Area). The Project would consist of up to 100 wind turbines, each with a nameplate capacity rating of 1.6 to 2.5 MW, resulting in a total generating capacity of up to 250 megawatts (MW) for the facility.

This DEIS evaluates the effects of issuing an ITP pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1531 *et seq.*). The Proposed Action is USFWS' issuance of a Section 10(a)(1)(B) ITP for the Covered Activities proposed in the draft Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). The HCP (Section 2.3) describes what are considered Covered Activities, including construction, operation, maintenance, decommissioning, and mitigation. The HCP outlines specific measures to avoid and minimize impacts to the Indiana bat as well as mitigation to offset the impacts of take that cannot be avoided or minimized. The HCP describes the monitoring and adaptive management that will occur to ensure that permitted take is not exceeded and mitigation is successful. The proposed permit duration is 30 years. Accordingly, this DEIS analyzes the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of approving the HCP and issuing an ITP, including impacts of the Covered Activities and measures proposed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential impacts on the Indiana bat as well as the effects of the activities on the human environment.

The purposes for the proposed action and preparing this DEIS are to respond to Buckeye Wind's application for an ITP for the Indiana bat; protect, conserve and enhance the Indiana bat and its habitat for the continuing benefit of the people of the United States (U.S.); provide a means and take steps to conserve the ecosystems depended on by the Indiana bat; ensure the long-term survival of the Indiana bat through protection and management of the species and their habitat; and ensure compliance with the ESA, NEPA, and other applicable Federal laws and regulations.

Under the Proposed Action up to 100 turbines and associated access roads, crane paths, electrical interconnection lines, staging areas, a substation, permanent meteorological towers, temporary concrete batch plants, and an operations and maintenance (O&M) facility would be constructed. Operational restrictions would include modifying cut-in speeds and feathering based on the location of each turbine in relationship to the season and suitability as Indiana bat habitat. The Proposed Action is economically feasible, and would reduce cumulative effects on all bats and migratory birds.

Alternative A, the maximally restricted operations alternative, would consist of the same build-out as the Proposed Action; however, all 100 turbines would be non-operational during the period when Indiana bats could be present in the Action Area (sunset to sunrise from April 1 through October 31). This Alternative would have substantially lower migratory tree bat

mortality than the proposed action, if not zero, and would reduce the collision risk to night-flying birds during this period. Thus, there would be negligible effects on Indiana bats under this alternative, and no mitigation would occur, including any research conducted on bat-turbine interactions, and no HCP would be implemented. A modified post-construction avian mortality monitoring program would be implemented for Alternative A to address bird mortality. Since under this Alternative all turbine activity would be curtailed from sunset to sunrise, a monitoring program for bat mortality would not be needed. Given the reduced operation time, this Alternative would generate less energy and income than the Proposed Action, and the Applicant asserts it is not economically feasible.

Alternative B, the minimally restricted alternative, would consist of the same build-out as the Proposed Action; however, all 100 turbines would be feathered until a cut-in speed of 5.0 m/s (11 mph) during the first one to six hours after sunset from August 1 through October 31. This alternative would include the HCP. Operations under this Alternative would have greater adverse effects on spring/summer populations of Indiana bats than the Proposed Action. Additional mitigation for take of additional Indiana bats would likely be necessary to offset the impacts. The effects of feathering on birds are not well known, and reduced cut-in speeds have not been clearly shown to reduce bird deaths. Given the increased operation time, this Alternative would generate more energy and income than the Proposed Action. However, given the minimal operational restrictions, it is likely that this alternative will result in higher levels of bird and all bat mortality than under the Proposed Action or Alternative A.

Under Alternative C, the no action alternative, the Project would not be built, and no Project-related activities (construction, operation, or decommissioning) would occur. Alternative C would have no effect on resources within the Action Area; however, Alternative C would not achieve the socioeconomic and environmental benefits including generation of clean energy, offset of emissions from existing power plants, generation of income from construction jobs, generation of tax revenues for municipalities and school districts, and generation of lease revenues for landowners. Implementation of this alternative would avoid direct and indirect impacts to Indiana bats from operation of the Project, including take of 130 Indiana bats and 16.0 acres of Indiana bat habitat, but would not result in benefits derived from implementation of the mitigation and conservation measures proposed under the HCP.

Under the Proposed Action the Project would provide a clean source of energy for the region, as well as generate income for the local communities. The Project would implement avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and conservation measures to ensure protection and enhancement of natural resources. See Chapter 5 for a full description of the effects of the three alternatives on resources within the Action Area.