

News Release

Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office
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Draft Habitat Conservation Plan for Auwahi Wind Power Facility Available for Public Comment

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces the availability, for public review, of a draft Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and incidental take permit application submitted by Auwahi Wind Energy LLC, a subsidiary of Sempra Generation, and our draft Environmental Assessment (EA) addressing the proposed project. The proposed 21-megawatt wind power facility is located in southeastern Maui on the lower slopes of Haleakala Volcano within the southern half of the Auwahi ahupua'a. Auwahi Wind Energy LLC developed the draft HCP in coordination with the Service and the Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) as part of the application for an incidental take permit for species protected under the Endangered Species Act. The draft HCP and EA are available for public review and comment for 45 days.

The draft HCP describes how Auwahi Wind Energy LLC will – to the maximum extent practicable – avoid, minimize, and mitigate the potential incidental take of protected species that may result from the construction and operation of the wind power facility.

An incidental take permit is required when non-Federal activities are likely to result in “take” of a threatened or endangered species while carrying out otherwise lawful activities. “Take,” as defined by the Federal Endangered Species Act, means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct. Harm may include significant habitat modification that results in death or injury to a listed species by impairing behavioral patterns such as breeding, feeding or sheltering.

Auwahi Wind Energy LLC is requesting a permit because incidental take of four federally listed endangered species may result from the construction and operation of the wind power facility. The four endangered species that may be affected are the Hawaiian petrel or 'ua'u, Hawaiian goose or nēnē, Hawaiian hoary bat or 'ōpe'ape'a, and the Blackburn's sphinx moth.

The proposed facility will consist of eight wind turbine generators, a maintenance building, an electrical substation, a battery energy storage system, underground electrical collection system, an overhead transmission line to connect the substation to the Maui Electric Company transmission line, two permanent meteorological monitoring towers, and service roads to connect the new turbines and other facilities to existing highways. Improvements to portions of Kula Highway and Papaka Road would also be made to accommodate transportation of oversized project loads. The Applicant has also applied for a State of Hawai'i incidental take license pursuant to Hawai'i state law. The permit authorizes the incidental take of the listed species for 25 years.

The endangered Hawaiian petrel breeds on Maui and feeds in the open ocean. After spending the winter on the open ocean, adults return to breed at their colonial nesting grounds in the interior mountains of Maui beginning in March and April. Fledglings - young birds on their first flight to the open ocean - fly from the nesting colony to the open ocean in the fall. Adults and fledglings are known to collide with tall buildings,

towers, powerlines, wind turbines, and other structures while flying at night between their nesting colonies and at-sea foraging areas. The endangered Hawaiian goose also occurs in the vicinity of the proposed wind energy facility and may collide with project structures. Acoustic monitoring has detected Hawai'i hoary bats in the area, and bat collisions with wind turbines have been documented in Hawai'i.

Adult Blackburn's sphinx moths feed on the nectar of native plants and lay their eggs on native and non-native vegetation. The proposed project will result in the permanent loss of 0.3 acre of the Blackburn's sphinx moth native habitat and 27.2 acres of degraded Blackburn's sphinx moth habitat.

Auwahi Wind Energy LLC is proposing mitigation measures on Maui that include: protection of a colony of breeding Hawaiian petrels on Haleakala from cat, mongoose, and rat predators; predator control or other management to conserve the Hawaiian goose at Haleakala Ranch or Haleakala National Park; development of a permanent conservation easement and restoration of native forest habitat at Ulupalakua Ranch to conserve the Hawaiian hoary bat; and restoration of Blackburn's sphinx moth habitat at Ulupalakua Ranch. This HCP incorporates adaptive management provisions to allow for modifications to the mitigation and monitoring measures as new information is obtained.

The draft EA considers the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed action of permit issuance, including measures that will be implemented to minimize and mitigate such impacts. The EA contains an analysis of three alternatives: (1) issuance of the incidental take permit to Auwahi Wind on the basis of the activities described in the proposed HCP (Proposed Action); (2) No Action alternative (no permit issuance and no measures by the applicant to reduce or eliminate the take of covered species); and (3) development of an alternative permit for the duration of 21 years. The draft EA also identifies additional alternatives that were considered but not fully analyzed, as they did not meet the purpose and need of the Proposed Action.

All comments from interested parties must be received on or before November 21, 2011. Written comments should be submitted to: Loyal Mehrhoff, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 3-122, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96850. Comments may also be sent via facsimile to 808 792-9580.

The Service will evaluate the permit application, associated documents, and submitted comments to determine whether the application meets the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act regulations and section 10 (a) of the Endangered Species Act.

Documents are posted on the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. Copies and additional information may also be obtained from Dawn Greenlee at 808-792-9400, or by writing to the address listed above.

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