

For immediate release
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Comment period extended on Beech Ridge Wind Energy Project in West Virginia

In response to substantial public interest and requests for additional time to comment, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has extended the deadline for comments on the environmental effects of a proposed Endangered Species Act permit for Beech Ridge Energy, LLC, until Sept. 23, 2010. The Service is preparing an environmental impact statement on the proposed permit for the Beech Ridge Wind Energy Project in Greenbrier and Nicholas counties, West Virginia.

Beech Ridge had constructed 40 turbines when the U.S. District Court of Maryland ruled that the company was in violation of the ESA for its failure to obtain an incidental take permit for the project's potential to kill endangered Indiana bats.

Beech Ridge agreed to apply for the required endangered species permit. Before the Service can issue a permit, the agency must analyze the project impacts to the environment. On July 22, the Service issued a notice to gather information to begin this analysis. Comments originally were due by Aug. 23; however, to ensure adequate public participation, the Service has re-opened and extended the comment period by 30 days.

Beech Ridge entered into a settlement agreement with the plaintiffs in the case that allows the company to build 27 additional turbines and to operate the turbines during times of the day and year when bats normally are not flying and would not be at risk of being killed by the turbines. These restrictions remain in place unless they are superseded by an ESA permit.

Consistent with the court order and settlement agreement, Beech Ridge is preparing a habitat conservation plan in support of the application for a permit from the Service to take (kill or harm) endangered Indiana bats and Virginia big-eared bats incidental to project operation. The proposed HCP would be designed to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts to the bats.

“The National Environmental Policy Act process provides an opportunity for the public to comment on the range of alternatives and issues to be included in the environmental impact statement for the proposed permit to Beech Ridge Energy, LLC,” said Deb Carter, supervisor of the Service's West Virginia Field Office in Elkins. “During the public comment period, we encourage people to submit information on

significant environment issues. This will help define the depth to which such concerns are addressed in the EIS.”

Information, written comments or questions related to the preparation of the EIS and NEPA process should be submitted to Ms. Laura Hill, Assistant Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, West Virginia Field Office, 694 Beverly Pike, Elkins, WV 26241; fax 304-636-7824; or e-mail to fw5es_wvfo@fws.gov. To ensure consideration, please send your written comments for receipt on or before Sept. 23. For further information, contact Hill at 304-636-6586, extension 18. Individuals who are hearing impaired or speech impaired may call the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8337 for TTY assistance.

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