

Biologists Raise Questions About Lowell Wind Project

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John Dillon - Montpelier, VT

(Host) State biologists have raised questions about how a wind energy development planned for the Lowell mountain range in the Northeast Kingdom might affect wildlife in the region.

VPR's John Dillon has more:

(Dillon) The Public Service Board holds hearings next month on plans by Green Mountain Power and Vermont Electric Co-op to build up to 24 wind turbines along the Lowell Mountain ridgeline.

State scientists have been studying the proposal. They say the project will convert what is now a roadless, forested area into an industrial site with wide roads carved into the ridgeline.

Eric Sorenson is a community ecologist with the Fish and Wildlife Department.

(Sorenson) "This would be a change in that there would be really a very wide road constructed. The road wouldn't have much traffic but it would be a wide road that would go from Route 100, up to the ridgeline and then extend for four miles along the ridgeline."

(Dillon) Sorenson said the road and other construction would break up the forest, resulting in a loss of wildlife habitat.

(Sorenson) "It's forest fragmentation; it's the effect on interior nesting forest birds. It's effects on bears' use of beech stands."

(Dillon) Wildlife biologist John Austin looked more closely at the bears - in particular the beech trees that produce nuts used by bears for food. Austin says 146 acres of bear habitat would be directly or indirectly affected.

(Austin) "And, you know, that's a significant impact, but it's not so significant that it couldn't be mitigated for."

(Dillon) Green Mountain Power is the lead developer. Spokesman Dorothy Schnure says the company is working to conserve a much larger piece of

land than would be affected by the wind project.

(Schnure) "Green Mountain Power has proposed that we would mitigate that by putting 400 acres of other land in a conservation easement for the life of the project, and nearly 300 acres of land that has bear-scarred beech and wetlands in conservation easement forever."

(Dillon) But the state says there's no agreement yet on how much land should be preserved - or for how long.

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