

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Wind Energy Policy Statement

*Approved by the Board of Directors
May 26, 2016**

Background

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) protects and restores exceptional places to provide our region with clean waters and healthy forests, wildlife and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations. To advance our mission, WPC collaborates with private landowners, state and federal agencies, local governments, conservation partners and a variety of grassroots organizations. WPC has played a leadership role in identifying the most ecologically significant locations throughout the commonwealth and has protected more than 252,000 acres of natural lands in Pennsylvania through acquisition of properties or conservation easements. These areas include large tracts of unbroken forest, lands in high quality watersheds, and rare habitats harboring a diverse variety of native plants and animals. WPC seeks to protect these exceptional places through collaboration with our partners, working together to advance mutual conservation goals.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy supports safeguarding significant ecological places as energy sources are developed, including oil, natural gas, coal, wind, solar, biomass, hydropower and nuclear. It is essential that the development of all energy sources in Pennsylvania be done in a manner that protects all of our lands and waters, and particularly our high value ecological places.

Broad Perspective

WPC supports the development of renewable energy sources, including wind, in suitable locations of Pennsylvania. To ensure the long-term viability of Pennsylvania's native plants, animals, and habitats, WPC encourages the use of natural resource planning tools to minimize impacts from wind development siting and installation of related transmission lines.

The development of industrial-scale wind energy facilities is occurring throughout Pennsylvania and is playing a role in reducing some of the negative environmental effects of fossil-fueled electricity generation. Some of the locations within Pennsylvania featuring the most desirable winds for energy development overlap with areas of high ecological significance, and many spectacular natural viewsheds and outdoor recreational places.

Upon the ridges of central and western Pennsylvania where high wind speeds are often present, can be found some of the most ecologically valuable forests and streams in the commonwealth. The forested ridges are also important habitats for bats and provide pathways for migratory birds. In addition, high wind speeds off the coast of Lake Erie and

along the coastline may be desirable for energy development. These areas provide critical habitat for rare and important plants and wildlife and are significant for migratory birds coming across the great lakes.

The above mentioned natural resources combine to make Pennsylvania a very special place, and it is imperative that safeguards be implemented during planning for the siting of wind energy projects and transmission lines to avoid significant negative impacts such as fragmentation of intact forests and bird and bat mortality.

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy supports and encourages:

- use of the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program data as a planning tool to guide siting of wind energy development projects and transmission lines on a statewide and local level to protect biological diversity;
- siting of industrial-scale wind turbines in areas that have already been disturbed, such as in reclaimed surface mining locations, fragmented agricultural landscapes and areas of minimal ecological value;
- continued research to fill data gaps regarding the ecological impacts of wind energy development;
- rigorous monitoring of all construction phases of wind energy projects and transmission lines to determine ecological impacts and appropriate mitigation to reduce or eliminate impacts;
- the development of “best management practices” for the siting and implementation of wind energy projects and transmission lines in Pennsylvania to reduce specific negative impacts such as forest fragmentation, loss of wildlife habitat, and bird and bat mortality; and
- collaboration among government entities, conservation organizations, and the public to balance our energy needs with the protection of ecologically significant animals, plants, habitats and significant outdoor recreational places and viewsheds.

Land Conservation by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

As opportunities arise to protect properties, both through purchases and gifts, WPC will evaluate the potential and actual impacts on each property from wind development to determine whether and how the property’s conservation values can be protected. When possible and when wind development poses a significant risk to the natural resources identified for protection, wind development rights will be acquired by WPC or limited by agreement with the property owners or the owners of the wind rights.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy has partnered with state and federal land management agencies to conserve thousands of acres of land, which are open to the public for hiking and other outdoor recreation. For many transactions, the agencies have provided substantial funding for acquisition. WPC will protect properties it conveys to the agencies by limiting impacts from industrial-scale wind energy development when appropriate and feasible, such as when WPC contributes a significant amount of the acquisition costs and wind energy development poses a significant risk to natural

resources. However, WPC would support agency efforts to develop small-scale turbines of a height of 40 meters or less to provide power to site specific facilities (see Note 1 below). Because every property and transaction is unique, WPC will work closely with the agencies to negotiate protections as appropriate and feasible for each property.

Over its history, WPC has retained ownership of certain high value conservation lands. These holdings represent special natural areas or conservation lands important to WPC programs such as the Bear Run Nature Reserve in Fayette County. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will not enter into industrial-scale wind development connected to the conservation lands it owns. WPC would explore and assess possible development of small-scale turbines of a height of 40 meters or less to provide power to site specific facilities if it could be done in a manner that protects conservation values (see Note 1 below). When the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy acquires conservation easements or sells conservation properties to private buyers, it will permanently restrict industrial-scale wind development when feasible and when appropriate because of a significant risk of wind development. Small-scale wind turbines of a height of 40 meters or less for on-site use in connection with farming and other operations will be permitted in most cases (see Note 1 below).

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy opposes industrial-scale wind development on the conservation lands it has historically conveyed to state and federal agencies, including but not limited to: state parks, state forests, state game lands, and national forests. Moreover, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy opposes industrial-scale development of wind in State Parks, Forests, Game Lands and National Parks, Forests and Recreation Areas. However, in both cases WPC would support small-scale turbines of a height of 40 meters or less to provide power to site specific facilities (see Note 1 below).

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is often asked to support or oppose specific development projects. WPC typically does not endorse or oppose individual projects. Rather, WPC advances its conservation mission through on-going scientific inquiry and collaboration with our partners. WPC directs its resources to areas where we can be most effective in achieving our mission.

Note 1:

Small-scale wind turbines are described by the U.S. Department of Energy as typically between 15 meters and 40 meters high.