

**NOTES | 9/21/2012 Conference Call****Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area Scientific Review Committee**

Prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy

Reviewed and approved by the SRC

**All 5 SRC Members Present****Discussion Topics**

- **AWI Request for 2012-13 Winter Shutdown Permit Exemption for 3 Turbines**
- **2012-13 Bird Year Monitoring Program Update**
- **FloDesign Detection Trial Expansion Proposal**

**Meeting Outcomes**

- The SRC recommended that the County approve the AWI request for a permit exemption for three turbines in the upcoming winter shutdown, provided that the turbines are adequately monitored and that Alameda County and the SRC be notified within two days if fatalities involving one of the four focal species or species of concern occur in the monitored area. In that case, the SRC could meet to consider potential responses.
- The SRC recommended that the County allow the expansion of FloDesign study detection trials to monitored turbine strings, with the involvement of an SRC subcommittee to ensure there is adequate coordination and communication between the two study teams, FloDesign and the Monitoring Team. The SRC recommended periodic updates.

**Action Items**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>SRC</b>	<b>Nov. 19, 2012</b>	<b>Next conference call meeting - 11 a.m.- 1 p.m. Pacific, 1-3 p.m. Central, 2-4 p.m. Eastern time</b>
<b>SRC</b>	<b>Dec. 5-6, 2012</b>	<b>Next In-Person Meeting – 1.5 days</b>
Alameda County/(tent) Monitoring Team	Friday, Oct. 5	Complete monitoring plan for 3 AWI turbines, provide for public review
AWI Turbines monitor (TBD)	During winter shutdown	Notify Alameda County/SRC within 2 days of fatality of four focal species/species of concern at AWI turbines; Provide data on non-focal species fatalities monthly
SRC	During winter shutdown	Be Available for conference call meeting within 2 weeks of notification of focal species fatalities at AWI turbines
Wind companies	ASAP	Provide comments as necessary on DIP
MT	ASAP	Add box to data sheets for searchers to self-identify “semi-blind” situations

Party	Due Date	Action
Shawn Smallwood	By time of Subcommittee meeting	Add to the FloDesign study distribution list to be informed of each carcass placement the Monitoring Team and Doug Leslie
MT	DONE	Hold conference call meeting of MT/FloDesign subcommittee by 9/28/12
MT, Shawn Smallwood	During FloDesign detection trials	Use MT/FloDesign subcommittee as needed to work on improvements to communication/coordination

### Introductions and Agenda Review

Sandra Rivera of Alameda County thanked the group for accommodating scheduling changes due to the delay in data and reporting, and apologized. Alameda County is considering changing some dates called for in the Adaptive Management Plan, because the SRC decision on whether avian mortality has been reduced by 50%, now held off until December, could require EDF (formerly enXco) and FloDesign to remove some turbines.

### Review and Recommendations on Altamont Winds, Inc., Request for Conditional Use Permit Modification for Three Turbines to Run during Winter Shutdown

#### Related Documents

[P249 Alameda County Memo and AWI Report on AWI Exemption Request](#)

[P247 AWI Request for Winter Shutdown Exemption for 3 Turbines](#)

Altamont Winds Inc. is asking for an exemption from 2012-13 winter shutdown for three turbines, for testing purposes. Sandra Rivera of Alameda County reviewed [P249 Alameda County Memo and AWI Report on AWI Exemption Request](#), which includes information the SRC requested for their review. Two of the three turbines have not been monitored for fatalities. She asked the SRC to provide recommendations to the Planning Director on the scientific implications of the proposed exemption on avian mortality and on the Monitoring Program. After the SRC recommendation, Alameda County will make a determination about CEQA review for the exemption.

#### SRC Questions

SRC members had the following questions:

- Is it true that none of the three turbines are currently monitored or would be monitored in the upcoming year? The Monitoring Team confirmed this.
- What is the HRT rating for the entire row of 56-100s? The Monitoring Team reported that seven turbines are rated 4.5 and two are rated 7.5. Andrew Ross of AWI added that the 7.5 turbines are end-row turbines, which are ranked higher. SRC member Jim Estep, a member of the subcommittee that conducted the 2010 ranking, said turbines 6639 and 6641 would be ranked relatively low, with the end-row

turbines ranked higher because of their position in the string, and also because they are in a draw. Generally speaking, the string would be ranked relatively low.

- Do the turbines have to be shut down for the whole winter shutdown period? Andrew Ross of AWI said the company has to ask for permission for the entire period, because it cannot forecast what days the wind will blow.

### **SRC Discussion**

SRC members raised the following points:

- Let AWI go forward and require that the turbines, or perhaps the entire string, be monitored in a sufficient manner to determine if there were any fatalities.
- It doesn't appear that the exemption would affect the functioning of the Monitoring Program. There is always the potential that operation could result in additional fatalities, but the number is likely to be very low. It doesn't seem to be a particularly significant issue.
- Since there has never been a situation with one turbine in a monitored string consistently running, there is no evidence for a substantial increase in mortality. The avian fatality analysis is done on a per-megawatt basis, and the amount of megawatts to be operated is minimal. There would not likely be a measurable increase in mortality.
- The monitoring of these turbines should be separate from the rest of the Monitoring Program.
- Because monitoring would be for a complete census at a small number of turbines rather than a sample of fatalities at a large number of turbines, there would need to be a narrower search interval compared to the Monitoring Program's monthly interval, such as every seven days.
- The SRC was concerned that these turbines might increase collision risk by creating a turbine gap (a non-operating turbine in between two operating turbines) or the potential for birds to perch on a non-operating turbine immediately adjacent to an operating turbine.
- One way to potentially mitigate for these effects would be to turn on a block of turbines, such as including the turbine between 6639 and 6641, which may reduce the potential for causing fatalities.

Bill Damon of AWI said that tests at ICC standards are required to have neighboring turbines non-operable.

### **Public Comment**

Tara Mueller of the State Attorney General's Office asked the following questions:

- Re the WEG 10, there have been some fatalities associated with that string, including two burrowing owls, an American kestrel and a red-shouldered hawk, although none were associated with that turbine. Is it possible the fatalities were assigned to a wrong turbine? Monitoring Team member Brian Karas said searchers search an entire string at once and the proximity rules are to assign a fatality to the closest complete turbine. It's a best guess at proximity, given the fact that fatalities can be flung from the turbine and scavengers can move carcasses.
- Are they associated with one turbine? In response, a Monitoring Team member said they would likely be spread out.

- Why was one of the three turbines not ranked? Brian Karas and SRC member Jim Estep said this would mean that the turbine would not have been up when the SRC subcommittee conducted ranking field visits. Based on the topography and other site characteristics visible in the AWI photographs, the turbine probably would have been ranked similar to turbine #6641, the lowest ranking allowed in the 2010 ranking.
- What would be the impact of turning on a block of turbines? In response, Brian Karas said winter is a low-wind season, so even if the entire string was turned on, not all turbines would function at the same time.
- What is recourse if one or more additional fatalities are found? Sandra Rivera agreed that there should be a caveat about a stop point in relation to fatalities of the four focal species or species of concern. There might be legal ramifications involving Golden Eagles.

Tara Mueller asked that there be a deadline by which the monitoring plan for the three turbines is submitted, and that it be determined who would prepare the plan and review it.

Some SRC members said there is going to be some additional risk, so the assumption would be that there will be some fatalities. However, a failsafe procedure would be helpful in case there are multiple focal species fatalities in a short period.

### **SRC Recommendation on AWI Request for CUP Modification to Exempt Three Turbines from the 2012-13 Winter Shutdown**

The SRC agreed that the operation of the three turbines would not likely result in a substantial increase in avian fatalities and would not likely impact the Monitoring Program. They suggested that a decision to allow the three turbines to operate include the following conditions:

- A condition that the turbines be monitored during the winter shutdown period with a 7-day search interval
- That the Monitoring Program/Alameda County not bear the costs of monitoring.
- That a plan for monitoring be developed and implemented
- That the SRC be notified within two days if fatalities of the four focal species or species of concern occur; they could then meet to consider options.

### **Public Comment**

Mike Lynes of Golden Gate Audubon said it is good to hear that the SRC believes the exemption won't create risk to monitoring or a substantial risk to birds. Audubon is concerned from a policy basis about individual birds that will be harmed. If AWI kills a bird so they can test and profit and sell their turbines, there should be a mitigation, because they are getting special treatment to make a profit, while other companies are complying with the shutdown. It's not an even playing field. The SRC needs to recognize that a precedent is being set and the door is being opened. The question is where will it stop: Five turbines? Six turbines? He also agreed with the concerns expressed by Tara Mueller.

Tara Mueller said she agrees with the concerns expressed by Mike Lynes about an uneven playing field.

## Next Steps

- Alameda County will work with the Monitoring Team to determine if it can develop the monitoring plan for the three AWI turbines.
- The monitoring plan for the turbines will be developed by the deadline of Friday, October 5. It will be made available for public review.
- Only a portion of the WEG turbine string needs to be monitored, because of spacing in the long string that creates separate islands of turbines.
- For fatalities of the four focal species at the turbine strings, Alameda County and the SRC will be notified within two days of detection. The SRC would be available during the winter shutdown to hold a conference call meeting to discuss response, with a two-week window for a meeting after notification.
- Notification to Alameda County and the SRC about non-focal species would occur monthly, unless there is high mortality.

## 2012-13 Bird Year Monitoring Program Update

### Related Documents

[M93 2012 Bird Year DIP Distribution Memo](#)

[P250 Alameda County Memo on FloDesign Detection Trial Expansion](#)

[P246 Smallwood FloDesign Detection Trial Protocol](#)

[P248 SRC Call Notes 7-12-12](#)

### *Update on 2012-13 Bird Year Monitoring & Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP)*

Monitoring Team Manager Doug Leslie said the Team will begin clearing searches soon for implementation of the new bird year monitoring design. He asked that the power companies review the DIP and provide any necessary feedback to the Monitoring Team to ensure that the design does not include turbines that are planned for shutdown/removal in the coming bird year.

At a May 2012 SRC meeting, the SRC recommended that the Monitoring Team redesign its DIP for the 2012-13 bird year to exclude FloDesign turbines, to the extent possible without impacting the sample design, as a way of avoiding coordination issues between the two teams with the overlap in monitoring. Doug Leslie said the Monitoring Team reviewed whether it could remove all the FloDesign turbines from monitoring during the coming bird year. Doing so would have significantly degraded the benefits from the rotating panel design, because a large chunk of monitored capacity for several BLOBs would be eliminated, and would unbalance the sample of turbine types. There are advantages to aggregating at the BLOB level for analysis.

### SRC Questions and Comments

SRC members asked the following question:

- What number of turbines is in the overlap? In response, the Monitoring Team had a figure of 192 turbines; Shawn Smallwood said the FloDesign crew is only searching 152 turbines. The discrepancy in numbers is probably caused because the FloDesign team does not search entire turbine strings.

SRC members were comfortable continuing with the approach used since April 2012, with the two teams coordinating in the overlapped area.

Doug Leslie said there had not been any notable problems with the overlap, except for a couple instances when a Monitoring Team search crew drove by and noticed a FloDesign crew member at a fatality, which compromised the blindness of the searchers.

SRC members suggested that proactive communication between team coordinators could eliminate such problems.

One SRC member asked that data sheets allow searchers to mark instances such as these when their search might be "semi-blind" rather than fully blind. This would be used to help bin the searches in developing the detection probability estimate – the model uses three categories: totally blind, not blind, and semi-blind.

***Proposal to Expand FloDesign Detection Trials to Monitored Turbines - Would the Proposed Expansion Impact the Monitoring Program?***

The FloDesign study began monitoring in April. In July, study leader Shawn Smallwood requested that Alameda County allow the study to begin placing carcasses as part of detection trials. At its July 12 meeting, the SRC recommended in support of carcass placements occurring only at non-monitored turbine strings. Shawn Smallwood is now requesting that carcass placements be allowed at monitored SeaWest turbine strings.

Sandra Rivera of Alameda County said the County would like to hear from the SRC if they have enough information to make a determination, and if so, if the SRC concludes that the proposed expansion would or would not potentially impact the Monitoring Program.

Doug Leslie, Monitoring Team Project Manager, said the proposal as outlined in P246 calls for not providing the Monitoring Team with carcass information.

Shawn Smallwood said that wording was based on the assumption that the Monitoring Team would not be monitoring SeaWest turbines, and he had no problem providing them with timely information on carcass placements.

Doug Leslie said he saw two sources of confounding factors with the overlap in studies:

1. It would add to the probability of misidentifying a placed carcass as a fatality
2. The search crew could be alerted to the presence of a fatality they would not otherwise know about.

**SRC Discussion**

SRC members raised the following points in discussion:

- The first issue could be addressed by careful record-keeping and marking; the second issue could be addressed, as it has been to date, with proactive collaboration and communication. These are controllable, not confounding factors. It seems like the two teams have been working well together so far and the issues have been very minor. The proposal could be supported with an assurance that communication occurs.
- The FloDesign study could provide interesting and important information.

- There should not be a significant bias as long as there is good communication and clear marking in the field.

Doug Leslie said that communication between the two teams has not been stellar to date. He suggested that the SRC might be able to play a role in helping to improve communication. He proposed that an SRC subcommittee of Mike Morrison and Jim Estep be established to work on the issue with the two study teams to improve interactions.

SRC members confirmed that they believe they have sufficient information to assess the impact of the proposed expansion on the Monitoring Program, and that they supported the proposed expansion going forward.

### **SRC Recommendation on Proposed FloDesign Carcass Placement Expansion**

The SRC agreed to support the proposed expansion, with the proviso that an SRC subcommittee of Mike Morrison and Jim Estep work with the two teams as needed to ensure communication and coordination.

### **Next Steps**

- Shawn Smallwood to add to the FloDesign study distribution list the Monitoring Team and Doug Leslie, , to be informed of each carcass placement. Each carcass is marked with feather clips and zip ties.
- SRC Members Mike Morrison and Jim Estep will be notified immediately by either Shawn Smallwood or Doug Leslie if any communication issues arise between the two teams.
- Doug Leslie will arrange a conference call meeting of the subcommittee within a week to confirm communication and coordination about procedures prior to FloDesign's expansion of carcass placements to monitored strings.

### **Public Comment**

Brian Karas said a webinar will be held Wednesday, September 26 on the EcoStat study that took place in the APWRA on estimating bird and bat fatalities (discussed previously by the SRC as the CalWEA study). SRC members and others are invited to join in to hear about the study results.

### **Wrap Up and Next Steps**

**November Conference Call Meeting:** The SRC will need to hold a conference call in the second half of November to consider how it would like to approach assessing hazardous turbines ranked 8.0 in preparation for a December recommendation. Discussion of the final fatality report could also be included on the agenda. A date and time will be announced.

**December 5-6, 2012 In-Person Meeting:** The SRC's next in-person meeting will be 1.5 days on December 5 and 6.

**ATTENDEES**

**SRC**

Joanna Burger  
Jim Estep  
Michael Morrison  
Sue Orloff  
Julie Yee

**Consultants**

Doug Leslie  
Brian Karas

**Identified Public**

Bill Damon, AWI  
Chris Dreiman, EDF (formerly enXco)  
Mike Lynes, Golden Gate Audubon  
Morgan McGovert, AWI  
Tara Mueller, Attorney General's Office  
Andrew Ross, AWI  
Joan Stewart, NextEra  
Shawn Smallwood

**Staff**

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