

NEWS FROM:

National Wind Coordinating Committee (NWCC)



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Collaborative Study of the Effects of Wind Power on Prairie-Chicken Demography and Population Genetics

WASHINGTON, DC, (May 9, 2006) – The National Wind Coordinating Committee (NWCC) Wildlife Workgroup announces a 4-year collaborative research project to study the Effects of Wind Power on the Demography and Population Genetics of the Greater Prairie-Chicken.

The Greater Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*) is a species whose population signals the overall health of grassland ecosystems and is found in Kansas, Oklahoma, and other parts of the Great Plains. Of interest to hunters, naturalists, and ranch owners, Greater Prairie-Chickens are considered sensitive to habitat disturbance because of their large home ranges and because population reductions and loss of genetic diversity are known to undermine their reproduction potential. Understanding how development of wind energy resources may impact the population viability of this species of conservation concern – and what strategies may be used to mitigate any impacts identified – is critical to future development of the wind energy resource in prairie ecosystems.

The Grassland and Shrub Steppe Species Collaborative (GS3C), a subgroup of the NWCC Wildlife Workgroup, brings together representatives from state and federal agencies, private industry, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations in a collaborative

effort to: 1) identify research questions; 2) secure and administer cooperative funding to conduct research; 3) encourage peer-reviewed collaborative research; and 4) identify both potential impacts and mitigation strategies to address impacts.

Funds are now in place to begin a 4-year study to establish what impacts, if any, wind power facilities have on prairie-chicken demography and population genetics. Drs. Brett Sandercock and Samantha Wisely from Kansas State University (KSU) are the principal investigators selected by the GS3C through a competitive bid process. The research will be conducted in Kansas' Flint Hills on land where wind energy projects are proposed and on control sites where development is not planned; the experimental and control sites are currently undisturbed prairie rangeland. This venture is an important collaborative scientific inquiry to establish whether there are effects from wind structures.

Contributors to the project include wind developers: FPL Energy, Horizon Wind Energy, PPM Energy; NGO's: Kansas and Oklahoma offices of The Nature Conservancy; state agencies: Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks; and the federal government: DOE's National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, wind developers DISGEN, Greenlight Energy, and Horizon Wind Energy have granted researcher access to three proposed wind sites.

“PPM Energy wants to develop wind energy in a way that protects the environments around our projects,” explains Wind Permitting Director Andy Linehan. “In the Great Plains, we know that there's a question about the effects of wind projects on grassland birds like prairie-chickens, so we're investing the time and money to make sure we understand the issue.” PPM Energy will highlight the research at the dedication of its Elk River Wind Power Project on May 11.

Wayne Walker, Director of Project Development at Horizon Wind Energy remarked, “Horizon Wind believes that wind energy must be developed in a responsible and progressive manner that moves towards achieving a sustainable domestic energy supply while protecting local ecological resources. We are proud to cosponsor the NWCC’s Greater Prairie-Chicken collaborative research, conducted by KSU.”

“Without scientifically rigorous information about wind energy's impacts -- or the lack thereof -- on grassland birds, we risk acquiescing to development in areas that could suffer serious ecological damage from the presence of wind turbines,” says Rob Manes of The Nature Conservancy’s Kansas Office. “Conversely, we may also risk forfeiting climate change mitigation and other ecological benefits of wind energy by unnecessarily resisting wind power development where it is ecologically compatible.”

“This collaborative research effort is unique,” contends Dr. Robert Robel, an expert on prairie-chicken populations. “Very seldom do you see developers, wildlife ecologists, federal agencies, state entities, and preservationists working together to examine a perceived problem,” explains Robel. “No matter what the outcome of the research effort, society will benefit from the scientific approach to the questions being addressed,” said Robel.

For more information on the NWCC or Wildlife Workgroup, please visit www.nationalwind.org. For additional information about the study, please contact: Dr. Robert J. Robel, Professor Emeritus, KSU, rjrobel@ksu.edu; Dr. Brett Sandercock, KSU, Principal Investigator, bsanderc@ksu.edu; or Dr. Samantha Wisely, KSU, Principal Investigator, wisely@ksu.edu.

About RESOLVE, Inc.

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