



The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

P.O. Box 42, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

JVAS.org

Vol. XLIV, No. 4 — September/October 2012

Pa. Senate Bill Threatens State Forest Land

BY DR. STAN KOTALA

Pennsylvania Senate Bill 1544, introduced by Senator John N. Wozniak, seeks to convert Pennsylvania's state forests into industrial windplants and other renewable energy projects. To read the text of the bill, go online to www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/bills/ and key in "SB 1544".

Conservationists should be aware of the threat that huge numbers of 400+-foot-tall wind turbines and their associated heavy-duty roads, transmission-line corridors, and substations pose to our state forests.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service describes three broad impacts of industrial windplants: direct mortality to birds and bats, forest fragmentation, and the inducement of avoidance behavior.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission writes:

"Wind farms have emerged as a new threat to species associated with higher elevation forests — particularly bats and birds. Studies at the Mountaineer wind-power site in West Virginia have yielded numerous dead bats of several species within a span of a few weeks. Given that many of these bats likely are migrants from the Pennsylvania region or from farther north, and that the number of wind-power sites in West Virginia and in Pennsylvania is increasing rapidly, the long-term impact on population levels may be quite severe.

"The installation of wind turbines at various ridgetop locations across the Commonwealth also is a cause of current concern for golden eagles and other migratory raptors. It has been demonstrated at Altamont Pass, California, that such facilities can cause direct mortality of golden eagles. Golden eagles

migrate during periods of low thermal lift, which makes them dependent on ridge updrafts."

According to the Pennsylvania Biological Survey:

"Another important — and often overlooked — impact of wind development is habitat fragmentation and its associated effects. These effects include reduced habitat area; habitat isolation and loss of species from an area; disruption of dispersal; increased edge effects and loss of core habitat; and facilitation of invasive species.

"Due to their linearity, roads and transmission lines — both of which accompany wind energy development — have particularly pronounced fragmentation effects.

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommends that wind energy development 'avoid fragmenting large, contiguous tracts of wildlife habitat' and advises that wind turbines be placed 'on lands already altered or cultivated, and away from areas of intact and healthy native habitats.'"

The Pennsylvania Biological Survey, a non-profit organization whose purpose is to increase the knowledge of and foster the perpetuation of the natural biological diversity of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and whose membership includes scientists, representatives of state and federal agencies concerned with natural resource management, and representatives of nonprofit conservation organizations, issued this statement in response to the threat of converting our state forests into industrial windplants:

[Continued on page 3]

The Gnatcatcher

VOL. XLIV, NO. 4 — SEPT/OCT 2012

Published bimonthly (except for July and August) as a benefit for members of the...

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Charlie Hoyer, Editor
P.O. Box 42
Tyrone, PA 16686-0042

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society and is dedicated to the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity. Juniata Valley Audubon accomplishes its mission through advocacy, science, land stewardship, and education — working directly with Audubon Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania state office of the National Audubon Society.

The JVAS is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit, educational organization as described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Gifts are deductible for income tax purposes (Tax ID # 25-1533496).

OFFICERS

President Dave Bonta 684-7274
bontasaurus@yahoo.com

Vice President &
Programs Committee Chair Laura Jackson 652-9268
mljackson2@embarqmail.com

Secretary &
Membership Committee Chair Dr. Alice Kotala 946-8840
ccwiba@keyconn.net

Treasurer & Historian Charlie Hoyer 684-7376
charma77@verizon.net

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation Committee Dr. Stan Kotala 946-8840
ccwiba@keyconn.net

Wetlands Committee *Vacant*

Education Committee Ruby J. Becker 515-6312
rubyjb@atlanticbb.net

Field Trips Committee Deb Tencer 932-9183
naturehikergal@gmail.com

Wetlands Committee *Vacant*

Hospitality Committee Marcia Bonta 684-3113
marciabonta@hotmail.com

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Warren Baker 684-4549

Mike Jackson 652-9268
mljackson2@embarqmail.com

Elisabeth Kotala 949-3663
ccwiba@keyconn.net

President's Message

Two recent local conservation victories show that grassroots activism and the threat of lawsuits can still work to protect our natural heritage from ill-conceived schemes and inadequate government oversight. At risk of over-generalizing, I find the parallels between the fight for Heller Caves and the fight for Shaffer Mountain instructive.

In both cases, threats to extremely vulnerable species and habitats were seemingly ignored by the officials in charge of permitting the proposed atrocities until local landowners began to express their outrage, and local and regional conservation groups, including the Juniata Valley Audubon Society and Save Our Allegheny Ridges, swung into action.

In both cases, we had to retain the services of environmental law firms before we were taken seriously. In the case of Heller Caves, the JVAS and the Center for Biological Diversity forced the developer to come to a settlement on very favorable terms, while in the case of the Shaffer Mountain wind project, the filing of a notice of intention to sue by the group, Sensible Wind Solutions, prompted the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to delay approval and conduct another environmental review. This bought valuable time and probably also helped convince Gamesa, the developer, that all the bad publicity and local opposition weren't worth it, though the primary reason it cited for its decision to cancel the project was the uncertainty about future federal subsidies.

And that's another parallel, because when the U.S. Department of Agriculture withdrew its loan guarantee to the developers of the Heller Caves quarry—after the JVAS pointed out the total inadequacy of their permit application—it became very unlikely that that project would ever go forward either. As environmental lawyer and activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. once said in a speech at Penn State, “Show me a subsidy, and I'll show you a polluter.”

Notice how this contradicts the popular narrative about environmentalism that we're always hearing from big corporations and their pet politicians in Harrisburg and Washington. In that narrative, environmentalists are outside agitators who

..[*Continued on page 3*]

President's Message [*Continued from page 2*]

don't care about people, coming in to wreck jobs and thwart local entrepreneurs, in cahoots with over-zealous environmental regulators. In reality, I think what we're seeing across Pennsylvania these days—especially with the shale gas boom—bears a much stronger resemblance to what we've seen locally with Heller Caves and Shaffer Mountain: Corporations from outside the area lured in by the prospect of public funding and the assurance that any and all environmental reviews will be streamlined by government regulators. And the environmentalists taking them on are, more often than not, folks who live right in the area and would be most affected by the development.

As dire as things are in Pennsylvania these days, it's nice to know that the little guy doesn't always lose, and that old-fashioned activism can still work. ❖

Senate Bill 1554 [*Cont'd from first page*]

"The environmental benefits wind energy development on natural resource agency lands in Pennsylvania are negligible compared with the environmental consequences. These lands should remain closed to wind energy development."

Juniata Valley Audubon agrees with the conclusion reached by the Pennsylvania Biological Survey. Because Pennsylvania's state forests are among the last remaining large blocks of unfragmented land in Pennsylvania, these lands are particularly in need of protection. Forest conservation — not energy extraction — should be the overarching purpose of our state forests.

Please contact your state senator and urge him or her to oppose SB 1544. For contact information for your state senator, go to www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/findyourlegislator/#address.

Do it today! ❖

Subscribe to JVAS eNews...
...to stay current with what's going on.
For instructions on how to subscribe,
go on-line to www.jvas.org/news.html.

Stern's Tax Credit Program for Farmers an Economic and Environmental Success**Applications now being accepted for 2012-13 Resource Enhancement and Protection Tax Credit Program**

State Rep. Jerry Stern (R-Blair) is encouraging area farmers to apply for the Resource Enhancement and Protection Tax Credit Program (REAP), which provides tax credits to farmers and agricultural businesses that implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce their environmental impact.

"As the son of a farmer, I am proud to have been the one to establish this program as a way to help today's farmers improve their farm operations while preserving the environment they rely on for their livelihood," said Stern. "REAP was the first of its kind in the nation and the results of this program have exceeded my expectation. I encourage all farmers to learn more about REAP and how it could possibly help them afford better farming practices."

Specifically, REAP is designed to help farmers afford BMPs to manage nutrients appropriately and reduce nutrient and sediment loss in the land. Examples of such practices include improvements to barnyards, pastures, and riparian corridors; development and implementation of nutrient management plans; and remediation of legacy sediments.

REAP provides state tax credits worth up to \$150,000 per farm to help producers pay for eligible BMPs intended to mitigate the potential environmental impact of their farming operations.

Applicants may receive a tax credit of 25 percent to 75 percent of the project cost, depending on the BMP selected.

The program, which was established in 2007, has since then approved a total of 2,609 projects worth more than \$39.5 million. Through those projects, REAP has helped reduce more than 11 million pounds of nitrogen, 859,485 pounds of phosphorus, and 877,059 pounds of sediment through 2010.

For more information about REAP, visit Stern's Web site at www.JerryStern.com. ❖

Opinion: Wind Power Development on Public Lands — It Isn't Worth It

BY THE PENNSYLVANIA
BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

The Pennsylvania Biological Survey is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to increase the knowledge of and foster the perpetuation of the natural biological diversity of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Our membership includes scientists, representatives of state and federal agencies concerned with natural resource management, and representatives of nonprofit conservation organizations.

PABS technical committees serve as official advisory committees to several natural resource agencies in the state, including the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Game Commission, and the Fish and Boat Commission.

After reviewing evidence on the environmental costs and benefits of wind energy, the PABS is opposed to wind energy development on Pennsylvania natural resource agency lands.

We are aware of the serious environmental costs of fossil fuel energy sources, including the threats of global climate change to Pennsylvania's natural biological diversity. We therefore support the responsible development of alternative energy sources, including properly sited wind energy development.

However, because wind energy development has associated environmental costs, wind energy development should only be instituted on state lands if the environmental benefits can be demonstrated to exceed the environmental costs.

Based on the available evidence, it is our conclusion that wind energy development is not suitable on state-owned lands where natural resource conservation is a major goal (i.e., primarily lands owned and managed by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Game Commission).

The reason for our opposition is outlined below but can be summarized as follows:

The environmental benefits of wind energy development, in the mid-Atlantic area in general and on Pennsylvania state lands in particular, are small

relative to the negative consequences, which include habitat fragmentation and mortality to birds and bats.

The primary environmental benefit of wind energy production is that it offsets the use of fossil fuels, thereby reducing emissions of carbon dioxide, a potent greenhouse gas.

The Department of Energy projects that by 2020, wind power will meet 1.2 to 4.5 percent of the country's electricity generation, and thus will offset emissions of carbon dioxide from electricity generation by 1.2 to 4.5 percent. Since electricity generation accounts for 39 percent of carbon dioxide emissions in the United States, wind power will offset between 0.5 and 1.8 percent of total carbon dioxide emissions (National Research Council 2007).

The National Research Council (2007) concludes "Wind energy will contribute proportionately less to electricity generation in the mid-Atlantic region than in the United States as a whole, because a smaller portion of the region has high-quality wind resources than the portion of high-quality wind resources in the United States as a whole."

Thus, it is apparent that wind energy development in the mid-Atlantic will offset a very minor portion of future carbon dioxide emissions.

Because Commonwealth natural resource agency lands make up only a fraction of land in Pennsylvania, the contribution of wind energy development on these lands to future energy needs, as well as any offset of carbon dioxide emissions, will be negligible.

Energy conservation, on the other hand, could considerably reduce the demand for energy and thus reduce carbon dioxide emissions. For example, residential home energy consumption in 2020 could be feasibly reduced by over one-third, using existing technologies (Bressand et al, 2007).

The environmental impacts of wind energy are considerable. Mortality to birds and bats has been of particular concern. Bat mortality from wind turbines has been particularly high, especially along forested ridgetops in the eastern United States.

Because bats generally have low reproductive rates, cumulative negative impacts of wind energy development on bat populations are likely (Kunz

et al, 2007). Based on projections of installed wind capacity, it is estimated that by 2020, annual mortality in the mid-Atlantic highlands could be as high as 45,000 birds (National Research Council 2007) and 111,000 bats (Kunz et al, 2007).

With wind energy development expanding on private lands in Pennsylvania, the forested ridges-tops of state-owned lands will become even more critical for birds, bats, and other species that utilize these habitats.

Another important, and often overlooked, impact of wind development is habitat fragmentation and its associated effects. These effects include reduced habitat area, habitat isolation and loss of species from an area, disruption of dispersal, increased edge effects and loss of core habitat, and facilitation of invasive species (Groom et al, 2006).

Due to their linearity, roads and transmission lines, both of which accompany wind energy development, have particularly pronounced fragmentation effects (Groom et al, 2006; Willyard et al, 2004).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2003) recommends that wind energy development “avoid fragmenting large, contiguous tracts of wildlife habitat” and advises that wind turbines be placed “on lands already altered or cultivated, and away from areas of intact and healthy native habitats.”

Because natural resource agency lands are among the last remaining large blocks of unfragmented land in Pennsylvania, these lands are particularly in need of protection. A publication produced by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Moyer 2003) emphasizes the importance of preserving these last remaining large blocks of unfragmented habitat in the state.

In conclusion, the environmental benefits that wind energy development on natural resource agency lands in Pennsylvania are negligible compared with the environmental consequences. These lands should remain closed to wind energy development. ❖

For more information on the position of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey, contact Dr. Tim Maret, Dept. of Biology, Shippensburg University, at 717-477-1170 or at tjmaret@ship.edu.

Audubon Programs — Sept-Nov

JVAS programs are presented on the third Tuesday in September, October, and November. Program meetings begin at 7 P.M. in the meeting room of the Bellwood-Antis Public Library, 526 Main St., Bellwood.

Take Interstate Rt. 99 to the Bellwood/Route 865 Exit (Exit 41). Follow Rt. 865 through the Sheetz/ Martin intersection. Proceed about four blocks and turn right just before the railroad overpass. Turn left at the dead end and travel to the stop sign. Continue a short distance; the library will be on your right.

Our programs, designed for a general audience, are free and open to the public.

“Wild Mushrooms of Central Pennsylvania”

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

Have you ever seen a wild mushroom and wondered if it was safe to eat? Here's your chance to find out. Join Karen Croyle for a fascinating look at fungi in our area. Karen knows where to look for mushrooms and will help you learn how to identify the ones you find. Find out which ones are edible and which ones are toxic. She has collected mushrooms for the table since childhood — first with her mother, then with expert Bill Russell, author of *Field Guide to the Wild Mushrooms of Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic*. Karen is a founding member of the Central Pennsylvania Mushroom Club and is eager to share her expertise with us. Karen says we can bring fresh mushrooms to identify!

“Raptors in Flight”

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16

Dennis Pagan will describe and solve some of the mysteries of bird flight, focusing on the soaring birds. How do they stay aloft and fly for miles without a flap of wings? Dennis will explain the design features that make bird flight possible and the micrometeorological effects that make it a reality. Dennis has been birding since age 13, but he brings a unique perspective — a result of his electronic engineering, aerodynamics, and meteorology background. Author of 14 books and more than 600 published articles on meteorology and sport aviation, as well as a designer of several successful hang gliders, Dennis will delve into the

mechanics of bird flight that will help us understand one of the greatest wonders on earth: how birds soar.

“Cougars: What’s Real and What’s Not Real”

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Kerry Gyekis, a consulting forester and former Tioga County planner, is active in the Eastern Cougar Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Harman, West Virginia.

Although the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service had officially declared in 2011 that the eastern cougar is extinct, people continue to report sightings of cougars in eastern North America.

Kerry’s program will highlight cougar biology and history, reproduction, attacks, tracking, and a collection of cougar sightings in the East — some real, some questionable, and some forgeries.

◇ ◇ ◇

Field Trips — Sept-Nov

JVAS field trips are coordinated by board member Deb Tencer. Those field trips marked with an asterisk are joint outings with the Moshannon Group of the Sierra Club. For more information about any JVAS field trip, phone Deb at 814-932-9183 or send her an e-mail message at naturehikergal@gmail.com.

Paddling Penns Creek*

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

Canoe or kayak through a scenic gorge and past Poe Paddy State Park on this relatively easy (Class I) stream, from Coburn to Cherry Run. Meet at 11 A.M. at the Coburn Tunnel. For directions or questions, contact Helena Kotala, 814-215-3675, hdkotala@gmail.com.

Nature hike at Fort Roberdeau Natural Area

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

Meet at 2 P.M. in the parking area in front of White Oak Hall, across from the fort. We’ll take a leisurely stroll through the forest and fields, observing late-summer flora and fauna. Trip leader: Stan Kotala, 814-946-8840, ccwiba@keyconn.net.

Biking and hiking on State Game Lands 166 To top of Canoe Mountain

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

This 5-hour outing includes spectacular views and diverse wildlife. It starts at Canoe Creek State Park, East Shore Launch, on Bass Ct. just off Beaver Dam Road. Meet in the parking lot at 10 A.M. We’ll bike 5 miles onto the game lands road and stop at the power lines. From there we’ll hike to the top of Canoe Mountain. Those who don’t want to bike may drive to the closed gate at the game lands and walk to the power lines. Bikers will meet with you in the parking lot near the gate. We’ll start the hike in the game lands around 11:15. Bring water and lunch. The biking will be easy; the hiking will be strenuous. Trip leader: Dave Hunter, 814-317-7971, davmhunter@aol.com.

Hiking to high point of Brush Mountain

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

Join hike leader Ruby J. Becker on a strenuous 4-hour excursion that will ascend 2 miles up the rocky and steep western slope to the top of Brush Mountain. Then, we’ll descend on the Sinking Valley side, ending at the home of Stan and Alice Kotala. The total distance is 3–4 miles, but the hike should be attempted by only those who are physically fit. Meet at 9 A.M. in the Burger King parking lot at the intersection of Kettle Road and Route 220, Altoona. We’ll carpool from there. Be sure to bring water and lunch.

Overnight backpacking in Thickhead Wild Area/Detweiler Run*

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6 & 7

This 2-day hiking/camping trip is on Long Mountain Trail and the Greenwood Spur of the Mid State Trail along Detweiler Run. It’s approximately 5 to 6 miles of hiking per day. Meet at Alan Seeger Natural Area at noon on October 6. RSVP by October 1 to Helena Kotala, 814-215-3675, hdkotala@gmail.com.

Observe spawning brook trout in Tipton Run

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13

Bring binoculars and polarized glasses for this streamside hike on State Game Lands 158, led by

Michael David Tarry. Meet in the parking lot between the Rossi Corner Store and Tipton Pharmacy, in Tipton, at 10 A.M.

JVAS bluebird trail maintenance at Fort Roberdeau Natural Area

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14

Meet at 2 P.M. in the parking area in front of White Oak Hall, across from the fort. We'll check the 25 bluebird nesting boxes that the JVAS maintains in the fields near the fort. Trip leader: Stan Kotala, 946-8840, ccwiba@keyconn.net.

Fall foliage hike on Lower Trail*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

Meet at 1 P.M. at the Mount Etna Trailhead. We'll hike 6 miles on this rail trail along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River, from Williamsburg to Mt. Etna. Trip leader: Alice Kotala, 946-8840.

Fall mushroom discovery walk

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21

Join JVAS member Karen Croyle and the Central Pa. Mushroom Club at Alan Seeger Natural Area for a fall mushroom discovery walk. Meet at the bridge at 1 P.M.

Francis Champion Memorial Hike

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

Meet at 1 P.M. at the Roots Trailhead of the Bell's Gap Trail. This 6-mile, downhill hike honors past JVAS member, Staff Sgt. Francis Champion, who died in a military training accident in 2011, and who had hiked with us on this trail many times. Trip leader: Stan Kotala, 946-8840, ccwiba@keyconn.net.

Horseshoe Curve hike

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17

Deb Tencer will lead this hike to the highest point above Horseshoe Curve and then to the State Game Lands at Gallitzin. This 4-hour hike is moderately strenuous. The view of Horseshoe Curve is incredible as you look directly down at it like a miniature train set. Meet at 11 A.M. at Horseshoe Curve, Altoona. We'll car pool from there. Pack a lunch and wear blaze orange. Deb Tencer, naturehikergal@gmail.com.

Post-Thanksgiving hike on Lower Trail

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24

Meet at 1 P.M. at the Alfarata Trailhead. We'll carpool from Alfarata to the Mt. Etna Trailhead and then hike 6 miles on this rail trail along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River back to Alfarata. Trip leader: Alice Kotala, 946-8840.

The JVAS Christmas Bird Count 2012

will be held on Saturday, December 15. The count is performed by bird-watchers who spend the day counting all the birds they can find in a 15-diameter circle centered on the village of Culp, in Sinking Valley

Birders — experts, novices, and beginners — enjoy doing some "citizen science" and then joining in for fellowship at a pot-luck supper and the count tally at the end of the day.

For more info, contact CBC compiler Steve Bonta at 684-1175 or at stevebonta@yahoo.com.

Discount Offered on Popular Bird Book

The book, *Birds of Central Pennsylvania*, by local birders Nick Bolgiano and Greg Grove, was published on January 1, 2010. The authors are now selling the book at a discount — \$16 per copy, or two copies for \$30, Pa. sales tax included.

Anyone interested may e-mail Greg at gwg2@psu.edu or Nick at nbolgiano@pennswoods.net. Books may be picked up in Chandler Lab on Penn State's campus, or at a State College Bird Club meeting. Or, books can be mailed (add \$3.50 postage).

The book (262 pages), is a revision and expansion of Merrill Wood's *Birds of Central Pennsylvania*, first published in 1958 and last updated in 1983. It brings up to date regional bird sightings since 1983 and expands the coverage area to a six-county area (Clinton, Centre, Blair, Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Juniata Counties).

The book contains chapters on the bird study and ecology of individual locations, updated and expanded accounts of 335 species, and bar graphs of seasonal occurrence and abundance. It's intended to be ornithological, educational, historical, and conservation-oriented; it's *not* primarily a bird-finding guide. ❖

JVAS THANKS ITS CORPORATE SPONSOR

JACKSONS JOURNEYS PHOTOGRAPHY

Mike & Laura Jackson

8621 Black Valley Rd.

Everett, PA 15537

814 652-9268

mjjackson2@embarqmail.com

JacksonsJourneysPhotography.com

- Nature Photography -
- Fine Art Prints -
- Nature Programs -
- Environmental Education -

Return Service Requested

**Juniaata Valley Audubon
P.O. Box 42
Tyronne, Pennsylvania 16686**

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Altoona, Pa.
Permit No. 238