

USDA Forest Service
September 2008



Subject: Development of Forest Service Wind Energy Policy

Summary: On September 24, 2007, we published draft wind energy guidance in the Federal Register, announcing our proposed amendments to our internal agency directives for special use authorizations, and wildlife monitoring specific to wind energy uses on National Forest Systems lands (NFS). The guidance was issued as amendments to Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 2709.13 - Special Uses, and FSH 2609.13 Chapter 80 – Monitoring.

On November 23, 2007, the comment period was extended to January 23, 2008. The Forest Service received 5,630 responses. Of these, approximately 5,500 are form letters, while the remaining letters consist of original responses or form letters with additions. We are using those comments, and as well as the best available science and recommendations to clarify the language and intent of our final guidelines. We expect to issue interim wind energy guidance by December 2008.

Background: In 2005, the Forest Service began developing wind energy permitting policy and guidance. The need for new and expanded guidance of established permitting directives was prompted by increasing interest by industry to develop wind energy facilities on National Forest System (NFS) lands, the passage of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, (P.L. 109-58), Executive Order 13212, Actions to Expedite Energy-Related Projects.

The intent of the draft guidance is to help local officials make well-informed decisions and ensure that adequate and consistent analyses and procedures are implemented to assess and evaluate proposals. The draft guidance ensures early collaboration with governmental agencies and the public, and addresses the need to consider the unique effects that wind energy development may have on certain environmental and visual aspects of an area. Forest Service wind energy policy, even in final form, will allow for the use of the best available information and science during project proposal assessment and development, including the FACA Advisory Team Recommendations/Guidelines, once they are available.

Wind Energy Developments on National Forest System Lands. The Forest Service has only one wind facility application being processed. The Deerfield Wind Project is a proposal to construct and operate a wind energy facility on the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF), near Searsburg, Vermont. Through NEPA procedures, the Forest is working with affected agencies and partners to identify the best set of management alternatives. The Green Mountain National Forest expects to release a draft environmental impact statement late in 2008.

The Forest Service has processed several metrological testing towers (MET towers) applications under its existing special uses regulations and policies.

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