

From there to here ...

Prairie Cuisinarts?

—Dennis Stillings

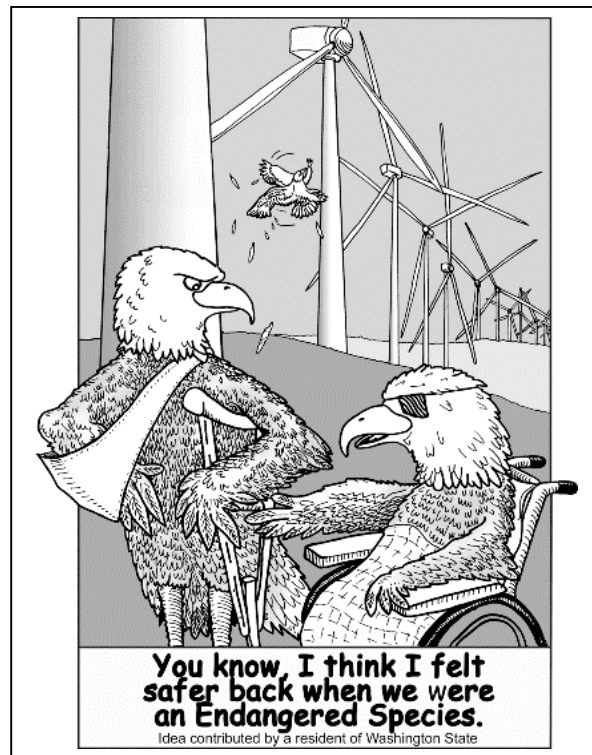
Because of the potential to kill millions of birds from global warming emissions, we're going to kill millions of birds with wind turbines.

— Bob DeGroot

A short time ago I would have considered this statement by Mr. DeGroot wildly exaggerated. After the protests attending the mass bird slaughters generated by the windmills at the Altamont, Calif. wind farm some 30 years ago, I was quite surprised to see an article appear in the *Wall Street Journal* with the title “Windmills Are Killing Our Birds: One standard for oil companies, another for green energy sources.” The author is Robert Bryce, managing editor of *Energy Tribune*, whose book, *Gusher of Lies: The Dangerous Delusions of ‘Energy Independence,’*” should clear away any illusions that wind power and ethanol will significantly diminish our dependence on fossil fuels.

The Altamont wind farm killed about 80 golden eagles per year. However, as Bryce points out, turbine technology is highly variable, and Altamont might therefore be considered a bad example. Nevertheless, the American Bird Conservancy estimates that wind turbines kill between 75,000 and 275,000 birds every year—and the current number of turbines is only a small fraction of what is planned. Bryce notes: “According to the American Wind Energy Association, the industry's trade association, each megawatt of installed wind-power results in the killing of between one and six birds per year. At the end of 2008, the U.S. had about 25,000 megawatts of wind turbines.”

And there is a huge double standard: Oil and conventional electric companies have been prosecuted and heavily fined for doing far less damage than the wind farms. ExxonMobile was fined \$600,000 for the pollutant deaths of 85 birds. The politically correct wind farms are



never prosecuted and, one may guess, management pays far less attention to this aspect of operations for that reason.

Several large wind farms are to be developed on or near migration routes and flyways in North Dakota and may have a significant negative effect on game birds.

* * *

As many of you know, I live in the middle of NextEra's Ashtabula 1 wind farm. This development runs parallel to at least part of a wildlife refuge that also lies close to our own property. Before the turbines came in last fall, we counted between 40 and 50 bird species (excluding waterfowl) on our seven acres. Ducks and geese flew low over our farmstead. Nearby ponds were filled with quacking and honking birds. Rabbits were abundant, and there were occasional pheasants.

Almost none of this remains: No rabbits, perhaps 10 to 15 bird species. Even the insects seem to have almost disappeared (except the ticks).

The more pleasant animals seem to have been replaced by an unusual abundance of frogs, toads, salamanders and slugs.

We would not for one minute suggest that the birds have all been transformed into a bloody mulch by the turbine blades. Perhaps the more aesthetically sensitive species find the towers repulsive, while slugs, ticks, salamanders and toads find them more appealing.

Since other property owners far from the wind farms have reported much the same phenomena regarding native critters, it is unlikely that the windmills are a factor, but it just feels like they could be ... Rumors exist, however, that the wind turbines are tough on bats, who may be specially confused by the spinning blades.

People do, however, have a couple of misconceptions about the turbines. They look at the blades turning and comment that surely birds would be agile enough to avoid them. No. It may not seem that way, but the blades commonly rotate at over 160 mph, and we know from experience that birds are frequently unable to dodge automobiles traveling at half that speed.

Also, animals are often seen calmly grazing close to the turbines. This is considered evidence that they do not mind the noise. In fact, the noise is at a minimum close to the towers; the loud, low frequencies are not heard until one gets some distance away.

Again, I would not make the claim that animals are unduly disturbed by the noise. As far as I know, NextEra's presence is an unmixed blessing.

I have, of course, considered trudging out to the wind turbines to see how many bags of bodies I might find, but the roads to the turbines are posted “No Trespassing.” I have no idea where I am permitted to walk, or whether the command not to trespass originates from NextEra, or from NextEra and the other landowner jointly. (Our own land is of a piece. It must be strange to have the fields so chopped up ... chopped up birds, chopped up land, as the old saying goes.)

Perhaps NextEra submits turbine kill counts to some governing agency. My observations regarding the relationship of “governing agencies” to wind farms would indicate that the former don’t give a hoot what the latter do. In any case, I haven’t heard of any accountability along these lines. It is quite possible that turbine kills occur, but the people at NextEra just don’t see them. I know that NextEra’s management personnel are nearly stone deaf, since they say that the noise of a wind turbine is about the same as the hum of a refrigerator ... but we will examine the noise issue at another time.