

Watt's Happening?

Written by Don Pettit
for Peace Energy Cooperative, Dawson Creek, BC Canada
www.peaceenergy.ca ph 250-782-3882



Myth Busting: *wind turbines and birds*



The 34 turbines of Bear Mountain Wind Park near Dawson Creek power most of the homes, farms and ranches of the south Peace, but also kill some birds and bats. Wind power,

however, is at the bottom of the list of threats to birds, while that lovely, soft purring friend on your lap is near the top.

I'm on holidays and probably so are you, so this issue I will re-visit an earlier column that answers the question: does wind power harm or benefit birds?

Editing and updating this column will also force me to set aside my current obsession (pun intended) with solar power, which is now poised to take the lead from wind power as the fastest growing energy source on the planet.

But wind power still leads and we'll be seeing more and more of it, yet I still hear weird miss-information about wind power that I had hoped would have been left behind long ago. So lets run through this again: the facts about wind power and the REAL

threats to our flying friends that we should all be concerned about: cats, glass buildings and climate change.

BEAR MOUNTAIN WIND PARK

Thanks to the extensive environmental assessment and follow-up studies required of wind facilities in Canada, we know that the 34 turbines of Bear Mountain Wind Park near Dawson Creek killed about 160 bats and 85 birds in 2010.

Not a nice thing to know if you are both a supporter of clean energy and a bird and bat lover, as I am. But can these numbers be put into perspective so that we

can honestly evaluate the impact of wind power on birds, and not just blurt out “Oh! How terrible!”?

CATS

I love birds, but I also love cats. Now there’s a serious contradiction! I know from my personal experience that a domestic cat kills at least 2-3 birds per year (probably closer to 10) no matter how many bells I attach to them or how carefully I try to keep them inside. Let’s be conservative and say 2 birds per cat per year.

My local veterinarian friend estimates that there are about 5000 domestic cats in Dawson Creek. That means cats kill at least 10,000 birds per year in this city alone. A recent study by the University of Georgia and National Geographic peg the bird deaths by domestic cats in North America at 500 million per year.

LETHAL ARCHITECTURE

Our obsession with glass buildings has created another very real and present crisis for birds worldwide. The organization FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness Program) pegs the number of bird deaths by glass windows at one billion (yes, billion) per year in North America alone.

New bird-friendly glass is under development (it has a pattern that is invisible to humans but visible in the ultraviolet to birds) but is not yet in widespread use.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change threatens every living thing on the planet, often in ways we are only beginning to understand. One of the best ways to slow and eventually stop climate change is to shift to ultra-low carbon energy sources like wind and solar.

Once set up and operating these energy sources are essentially carbon-free. A complete shift to renewables (and yes, that IS possible: the subject of a future *Watt’s Happening* column and the goal of a growing number of countries today) along with energy conservation and efficiency will eventually slow and then stop climate change.

Wind and solar power have a carbon footprint, certainly. Manufacturing and installation cost carbon. But once up and running, a steady stream of carbon-free electricity quickly compensates for this carbon cost.

Remember, with wind and solar we’re not burning a carbon fuel to create electricity because WIND and SUNLIGHT are the fuels! Compare that to coal, diesel or gas-fired generators, which NEVER work off their carbon footprints, but only add to them as long as they are running.

No energy source is perfect. They all come with a price tag. Wind and solar power have the smallest carbon and environmental price per watt of any modern energy source, by far, and they both help birds and bats by slowing climate change. Period.

If you want to take personal, direct action that really will save and protect the precious lives of our winged friends – support wind and solar power, and by all means have your cat neutered!

Below: Dawson Creek, BC’s first wind-powered city, with Bear Mountain Wind Park along the horizon. We can safely say “wind powered city” because Dawson Creek is the largest and closest load to the wind park, so those wind electrons will power the city and area first, then the balance will feed into the wider grid.

