

# Policy on Wind Power Development along the Appalachian Trail in Maine

(as adopted by the Executive Committee of the Maine Appalachian Trail Club on November 6, 2009)

The Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) supports significant increases in renewable energy that result in actual greenhouse gas and air pollutant reductions and are balanced with strong protection of natural and recreational resources of statewide significance. The MATC recognizes the need to develop wind power as a renewable energy source. However, this need must be balanced against the recreational, scenic, natural, and cultural resources of the Appalachian Trail in Maine. Careful siting of wind energy facilities is crucial in the protection of the Appalachian Trail experience.

- I. **Background:** The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) is a national icon, and its scope and significance reach well beyond the state and regional levels. The A.T. is a 2,174 mile continuous footpath that traverses the Appalachian Mountains from Maine to Georgia.

The MATC was formed in 1935 and has responsibility for management, maintenance, and protection of 267 miles of the Appalachian Trail, 40 miles of related side trails, and over 35,000 acres in Maine. The Appalachian Trail in Maine travels through a rich and varied mountain landscape that is widely recognized as one of the wildest and most spectacular sections of the entire A.T. The A.T. was built here in the 1930's and traverses some of the most diverse natural communities in the state and provides what is arguably one of the most remote and wild recreational resources in the Eastern United States.

The MATC seeks to preserve and protect the scenic, cultural, and natural resources of the Appalachian Trail and the Appalachian Trail experience as defined by the 1968 National Trails Systems Act and Appalachian Trail policy. As such, the MATC will seek action to avoid, minimize, or eliminate the visual, noise, and experiential impacts of wind power development along the Appalachian Trail in Maine.

- II. **Wind Power Development in Maine:** Recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Wind Power Development (Task Force) were adopted by the Maine State Legislature in 2008 (LD 2283). The legislation established specific goals for wind power development in the state, created expedited permit areas, streamlined the permitting process, and eliminated the requirement for rezoning in the unorganized territories. The Task Force concluded that Maine can become a leader in wind power development and that the State should encourage development of at least 3,000 MW of installed wind capacity by 2020. Based on existing technology, 3,000 MW's of wind capacity will require construction of more than 1,000 wind turbines in the state. As a result of this legislation and other incentives, there has been a proliferation of proposals for wind power development in the state. MATC feels that appropriate wind power siting issues and the environmental costs associated with wind power development were not adequately addressed in the legislation and that wind power development should be limited to sites that contain few to no recognized natural and recreational resources of statewide, regional, or national significance.

III. **Impact to the Appalachian Trail in Maine:** The siting of wind power facilities requires an adequate wind resource, much of which in Maine is located in mountainous undeveloped areas of potentially high ecological, recreational, and scenic value. Most of the A.T. in Maine is located in unorganized townships that are governed by the State and in which land use is controlled by the Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC). The remote undeveloped quality of the land area that surrounds the A.T. is particularly sensitive to changes in land use. Maine's mountains are an important natural resource and their value is particularly important because of their scarcity. Mountain areas above 2,700 feet account for only 6/10<sup>th</sup> of 1% of the state's total land area. Unfortunately the developers of utility scale wind power turbines are also attracted to this scarce and fragile landscape.

IV. **Evaluation Criteria:** Each wind power project will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and MATC may oppose, may not oppose, or may not oppose with conditions, using the following criteria:

- ***Appalachian Trail Lands:*** Wind power facilities are not appropriate on any of the lands that are part of the Appalachian Trail corridor, which includes lands acquired by the National Park Service under Appalachian Trail authorities, Appalachian Trail Management Plans, protection zones outlined in cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding with local, state, or federal agencies, or in any other instrument that defines protected areas of the Appalachian National Scenic Trails.
- ***Visual Impacts:*** The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is managed to preserve scenic integrity. The ATC, MATC, and other related organizations have developed policies that are designed to minimize impacts to the natural landscape. Because of the size of modern wind turbines and related infrastructure, these facilities are visually prominent and can have major impacts on the desired natural character of the A.T. MATC will use the USFS Scenery Management System to evaluate impacts of proposed wind turbines or wind farms on the Appalachian Trail viewshed.

MATC opposes new wind-energy facilities in the fore- and midground view sheds (up to four miles). In the case of projects in the background viewshed (four miles to the horizon) visual impacts will be weighed based on the following factors:

- *Height and Size of the turbines;*
  - *Presence or absence of FAA Hazard Lighting;*
  - *Number of turbines, layout & siting of associated infrastructure;*
  - *Developed vs. undeveloped landscape setting;*
  - *Cumulative impact of other wind power projects;*
  - *Viewpoints on the A.T. from which the project can be seen.*
- ***Noise Impacts:*** Turbines make noise as they spin, particularly in high wind conditions. Turbines should not be heard from the Appalachian Trail footpath and its facilities.
  - ***Project Setting:*** The setting for a wind farm is crucial in determining the degree of impact on surrounding lands including A.T. lands.

The following settings are better suited to the development of wind energy facilities:

- Ridges with existing high-standard roads, and/or with slopes suitable to road and turbine construction
- Ridges with existing developments such as telecom towers, ski areas, microwave relay towers, power lines and similar development
- Ridges with permanent landscape alterations

The following settings are not suited to wind-energy facilities:

- Ecological reserves and study areas
  - National Parks
  - Semi-primitive non-motorized areas and roadless areas
  - Old-growth forests and habitat for rare species or exemplary natural communities
  - Cultural sites or historic landmarks
  - Important bird and migration routes
  - Unique or important ecological or recreation sites identified by state, regional or local land-use plans, in particular areas with elevations above 2,700 feet.
  - Ridge tops with very steep slopes or soils ill-suited to road building and turbine construction;
  - Areas that receive a high level of backcountry recreational use or where the potential for increased backcountry use is high.
- **Mitigation and Off-sets:** Is there adequate mitigation or off-sets for any significant loss of Trail values? In cases where a mountain-top wind farm is proposed, achieving on-site mitigation may prove to be impossible. In those cases, off-site mitigation or off-sets may be considered. Examples of off-site mitigation or off-sets include additional conservation-land acquisition, removal of other developments, and designation of lands as off-limits to future development through conservation easements, among other techniques.
- **Energy Issues:** Because there are both societal benefits to renewable energy and significant adverse impacts associated with the installation of wind farms, the benefits of any individual project must be weighed in relation to the costs.

Some of these factors include:

- i. Source of power that is likely to be displaced by the wind farm: Will the wind displace fossil-fuel plants or other renewable sources?
- ii. Power production in relation to the severity of impacts: Will the amount of power produced be in proportion to the severity of the impacts?