



Save The River

Upper St. Lawrence **RIVERKEEPER**®

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Position Paper

Save The River Position on Industrial Wind Development within the St. Lawrence River Valley

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The abundant natural resources and the beauty of the Thousand Islands are among the region's greatest assets. They are the foundation for a vibrant ecology, clean drinking water, and an economy dependent on tourism and recreation. Save The River's purpose is to protect the quality of the Upper St. Lawrence River through advocacy, education and research, so the waterway continues to sustain a healthy ecology for future generations. Given this purpose, Save The River is keenly aware of the need for effective solutions to climate change, and supports efforts to shift to renewable energy sources in general. However, we are also gravely concerned about the scale and potential impacts of commercial wind development along the St. Lawrence River.

The Upper St. Lawrence River valley has one of the most unique and substantial grassland habitats in eastern North America; a habitat that is home to specialized grassland bird populations, as well as a home and critical seasonal foraging habitat for a variety of winter raptors. The grassland habitat includes Amherst and Wolfe Islands in Canada, Stony and Galloo Islands in the U.S., as well as major portions of the US and Canadian mainland towns bordering the Upper St. Lawrence River. The importance of this habitat is accentuated by the scarcity of such grasslands in this geographical region. In addition, the northeastern portion of Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River is an important migratory flyway for a large number of waterfowl and songbird species that pass through our area en route to and from northern breeding grounds.

It also should not be overlooked that the federally listed endangered species, the Indiana Bat, has been identified as a resident of this same grassland community. This species must be protected from impacts associated with wind turbines.

Given the many issues listed above, it becomes extremely important for our communities to learn from the only operational wind farm currently in the flyway – Wolfe Island – before moving forward with wind farm development on the scale currently proposed. While the Wolfe Island wind farm has only 86 turbines, more than 400 turbines in as many as six different projects are currently proposed in every direction around Wolfe Island. Cumulatively, these projects could radically alter these habitats that our communities have long endeavored to protect.

Initial reports of bird and bat fatalities associated with the July – December 2009 operation of the Wolfe Island Wind Project have just recently been released, and several experts have voiced concerns that the bird mortality is on target to be among the highest in North America. During the same 6-month period, 1,270 bat mortalities were estimated from the wind farm operation. In light of these documented high fatality rates, a major concern is the apparent lack of coordination between the US and Canadian governments (Federal, Provincial, and State) in addressing the cumulative impacts on wildlife resources from the numerous industrial-scale wind projects proposed in the upper St. Lawrence valley.

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The initial high avian and bat mortality documented at the Wolfe Island Wind Project along with the lack of any cumulative impact assessment for wind projects proposed within the St. Lawrence valley, demand a “wait and see” response from decision makers in the communities that are now involved with examining environmental impact studies from wind developers. With less than a year of avian fatality study completed at Wolfe Island, it will require several more years of data collection to better understand the extent of fatalities associated with the island’s wind turbine operation. Given the grassland habitat and coastal area similarities across the region, the next two years of post-operational studies at Wolfe Island will provide important data for assessing potential cumulative wind turbine impacts on wildlife resources in the upper St. Lawrence River valley.

To address these concerns, Save The River supports the following:

- 1. A three-year moratorium on wind project development in municipalities bordering the Upper St. Lawrence River, in the US and Canada.*
- 2. A cumulative assessment of bird and bat mortality as well as other environmental impacts, for the upper St. Lawrence River valley, coordinated by agencies in the US and Canada, considering two regional scenarios, one for 500 wind turbines and the other for 1,000 wind turbines.*

In summary, the special nature of the place that we inhabit, including the importance of the habitat and flyway, when taken with the scale of the wind energy projects proposed, the lack of a process to assess cumulative review, and the initial indications of substantial impacts to birds and bats, all lead us to conclude that wind projects proposed for our area should not proceed further until the Wolfe Island Wind post-construction wildlife impact study is completed and a cumulative wildlife impact assessment involving the US and Canadian governments has occurred.