

CBS News – March 20, 2009

Birds In Decline; Energy Production Blamed

Report: Steep Drops In Population Over Last 40 Years Pegged To Expansion Of Energy

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[The U.S. State of Birds report](#), released by the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar on Tuesday, was requested in October 2007 by President George W. Bush.

WASHINGTON, March 20, 2009

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An adult male cerulean warbler is seen in Litchfield County, Conn. (AP/National Audubon Society)

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(AP) Energy production of all types - wind, ethanol and mountaintop coal mining - is contributing to steep drops in bird populations, a new government report says.

The first-of-its-kind report chronicles a four-decade decline in many of the country's bird populations and provides many reasons for it, from suburban sprawl to the spread of exotic species to global warming.

It shows that birds in Hawaii are more in danger of becoming extinct than anywhere else in the United States. In the last 40 years, populations of birds living on prairies, deserts and at sea have declined between 30 and 40 percent.

But in almost every case, energy production has also played a role.

Environmentalists and scientists say the report should influence the Obama administration to act cautiously as it seeks to expand renewable energy production and the electricity grid on public lands and tries to harness wind energy along the nation's coastlines.

"We need to go into these energies with our environmental eyes open," said John Fitzpatrick, the director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, which helped draft the report along with non-profit advocacy groups. "We need to attend to any form of energy development, not just oil and gas."

Many of the bird groups with the most rapid declines in the last 40 years inhabit areas with the greatest potential for energy development.

Among the energy-bird conflicts cited by the report:

- More than half of the monitored bird species that live on prairies have experienced population losses. These birds, such as the Lesser Prairie Chicken, are threatened by farmers converting grasslands into corn fields to meet demand for biofuels.
- In the Arctic, where two-thirds of all shorebirds are species of concern, melting ice brought about by climate change could open up more areas to oil and gas production. Studies show that trash near drilling rigs attracts gulls that prey on other species.
- Mountaintop coal mining in Appalachia clears patches of forest contributing to the decline of birds like the Cerulean warbler that breeds and forests in treetops.

The report did not indicate whether one form of energy production is more detrimental than the other.

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