



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Wind Energy Facilities

Published: 2007	Reviewed:
Category: External Threats	Updated:

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), a §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works closely with Appalachian Trail volunteer maintaining clubs (“Clubs”) and other public and private partners to ensure the protection and stewardship of the natural, cultural, and experiential resources of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (known as ANST, A.T., or “the Trail”). Approximately fifty federal, state, or other public agencies have authority or jurisdiction over lands and resources within the protected A.T. corridor. ATC has a central management role by virtue of its Cooperative Agreement with the USDI National Park Service and its close working partnership with the USDA Forest Service and other agencies.

ATC's Trail management and conservation policies are meant to provide guidance for (a) dissemination to the public; (b) use and implementation by the ATC and the Clubs; and (c) recommendations for land-managing and other agencies. It is the agencies who work within their defined procedures to propose, administer, and enforce public policy. ATC policies are recommendations developed to support appropriate, coordinated Trailwide management.

Overview

Policy

ATC will participate, and encourage A.T.-maintaining clubs and agency partners to participate, in public-review processes for all wind-energy development proposals located within the viewshed of the Appalachian Trail.

Under the wind-energy facility policy, ATC may decide to oppose, to not oppose, or to endorse any proposed project. Decisions will be made using the following evaluation criteria:

1. **Appalachian Trail Lands:** Wind-energy facilities are not appropriate on any of the lands that are part of the Appalachian Trail corridor. The corridor is defined as those lands acquired by the National Park Service under Appalachian Trail authorities, Appalachian Trail Management Areas or Prescription Areas delineated in National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans, protection zones outlined in cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding with local, state or federal agencies, or any other instrument that defines protected areas of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.
2. **Visual Impacts:** The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is managed to preserve scenic integrity. The Conservancy has developed a body of policies designed to maximize natural or natural-appearing landscapes. Because of the size of modern wind turbines and the

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Wind Energy Facilities

necessity of locating them on mountaintops, these facilities are visually prominent and can be serious intrusions on the desired natural character of the A.T. viewshed. ATC will use the USFS Scenery Management System to evaluate impacts of proposed wind turbines or wind farms on the Appalachian Trail viewshed. In general, ATC opposes new wind-energy facilities in the foreground and middleground viewsheds (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: The height of the turbine will have a great deal to do with its visual prominence.
- Presence or absence of FAA Hazard Lighting: Currently, structures more than 200-foot tall are required to have FAA hazard beacons to protect against aviation collisions. Hazard lighting has a significant impact on visual integrity of a landscape, even at great distances. Lighting also may negatively impact or kill birds and bats. In some settings, turbines less than 200 feet that are not lighted may be acceptable where larger towers with aircraft hazard beacons may not.
- Scope of the project: The number of turbines and the length of ridgeline that is developed will affect the visual prominence and the number of Trail viewpoints from which the project will be visible. The siting of the associated infrastructure can also have a significant affect on the A.T. viewshed. Locations and construction of power lines and roads should be analyzed as part of any visual assessment.
- Landscape setting: Undeveloped landscapes are less acceptable for development than settings with other permanent signs of development such as cities and towns, roads, mountaintop developments such as telecom towers or ski areas, or permanent landscape alterations such as a mine or quarry. Temporary landscape modifications such as timber harvesting should not be used as a factor in deciding whether a landscape setting is suitable for wind-energy development. An additional factor is the viewer's location on the Appalachian Trail. Viewing locations that offer sweeping long-distance vistas to A.T. hikers such as balds, open areas, alpine areas, cliffs or firetowers are considered more sensitive. Also, viewing locations that are in designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, National Recreation Areas, NPS Natural Areas and remote areas more than two miles from a trailhead or road crossing are considered more sensitive. The number of Trail locations from which a project is visible also will be a factor. If a project is visible from a single location it may be more acceptable than if it is visible from several prominent vistas over a longer section of the Trail.

3. 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 on an ongoing basis.

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy

Wind Energy Facilities

4. 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 in proximity to developed landscapes such as cities and towns
- Ridges with permanent landscape alterations such as mines or quarries, highway cuts, recovering areas, etc.
-

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

- Wilderness areas and study areas
- National Recreation Areas
- Semi-primitive non-motorized areas (USFS lands) and roadless areas
- Old-growth forests and habitat for rare species or exemplary natural communities
- Cultural-resource sites or historic landmarks
- Important bird or bat habitats and migration routes
- Unique or important ecological or recreation sites identified by state, regional or township land-use plans.
- Ridge tops with very steep slopes or soils ill-suited to road building and turbine construction.

5. Public vs. Private Lands: Wind-energy facilities are being considered on both public and private lands. ATC believes that wind-energy facilities are best suited to private lands. If a project is being considered on public lands, there should be no net loss of A.T. values as a result of the development. Mitigation, on or off-site, may be applied to achieve the no-net-loss of Trail values standard.

6. 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. The trade-offs of mitigation or off-sets require careful consideration for unintended consequences, e.g., visual vs. wildlife.

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy

Wind Energy Facilities

7. Also, 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:

- Source of power that is likely to be displaced by the wind farm: Will the wind displace fossil-fuel plants or other renewable sources? (This is a remarkably complex question, but in some circumstances it seems likely that wind will not displace fossil fuels, but rather will lead to closure of biomass generation or increased peaking of hydroelectric dams.)
- Power production in relation to the severity of impacts: Will the amount of power produced be in proportion to the severity of the impacts?

For questions related to this policy please contact the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at www.appalachiantrail.org, or P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV, 25425-807.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.