

Leading Canadian conservation groups say wind farm doesn't belong in Important Bird Area

Title Nature Canada (BirdLife Partner) and Ontario Nature are urging Gilead Power Corporation not to build a wind turbine farm in the heart of the globally significant Prince Edward County South Shore Important Bird Area. Last April, the Ontario government granted the Peterborough renewable energy company permission to proceed with its proposal to construct a \$45 million wind power farm on crown land along Lake Ontario in Prince Edward County. The public commenting period on the environmental review conducted for Gilead ends on November 24, when the process shifts to the Province for review and a final decision on whether the project can proceed. Ostrander Point is located just west of the Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area, near the eastern end of Lake Ontario, and is believed to contain some of the best bird habitat in southern Ontario. "We recognise the importance of developing wind and other renewable energy sources", said Ted Cheskey, Nature Canada's manager of bird conservation programs. "But renewable energy projects must be done right. The Ostrander Point site is the most extreme example of a good idea in the worst possible place. It has the potential of being far more damaging to bird populations than the TransAlta wind plant on Wolfe Island where 600 birds and more than a thousand bats were killed by turbines in only six months." "Through careful, well thought out siting, we can have wind projects without wrecking local biodiversity or severely damaging bird populations", said Anne Bell, senior director of conservation and education for Ontario Nature. "However, this project does not even come close to meeting that criteria." The proposed wind farm would include nine 75m towers, situated in rare alvar habitat – a unique ecosystem that supports rare plants and animals, including 14 breeding bird species of conservation concern. A 'river of birds' migrates through the area each spring and fall due to its unusual geography and exceptional habitat – studies have revealed up to 160,000 birds flying through during the fall migration. Both familiar and at-risk species such as Tree Swallows, saw-whet owls, Golden Eagles and Whip-poor-wills, would be placed at significant risk from this project. Moreover, this site is one of the most concentrated areas for hawk and owl migration, with numbers of hawks peaking in early October at 70 to 109 observations/hour. On a single day in October, 60 Golden Eagles and more than 1,000 Red-tailed Hawks flew over nearby Prince Edward Point. Most of the coastal habitat of the lower Great Lakes – Ontario, Erie and Huron – has been modified or transformed for human use. Little natural coastline remains. Ostrander Point is natural habitat, and, because it is located on a narrow peninsula, a high concentration of birds, bats

and other wildlife can be found in the area's woodlands and wetlands. Because of the site's extraordinary significance for birds and other wildlife, Nature Canada and Ontario Nature share grave concerns that the project would damage a significant breeding bird community, kill high numbers of migratory birds, and jeopardize the government's responsibility for protecting Ontario's biodiversity. "Ostrander Point should not be the site of a wind energy park", said Cheskey. "It should be conserved and managed so that its significance for migrating and breeding birds is ensured in perpetuity."