

# US proposal would permit eagle deaths as renewables expand

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Clouds cast shadows near wind turbines at a wind farm along the Montana-Wyoming state line on June 13, 2022. The Biden administration is proposing a new permitting program for wind energy turbines, power lines and other projects that kill bald and golden eagles. Credit: AP Photo/Emma H. Tobin, File

The Biden administration on Thursday proposed a new permitting

program for wind energy turbines, power lines and other projects that kill eagles, amid growing concern among scientists that the rapid expansion of [renewable energy in the U.S. West](#) could harm golden eagle populations now teetering on decline.

The Fish and Wildlife Service program announced Thursday is meant to encourage companies to work with officials to minimize harm to golden and [bald eagles](#).

It's also aimed at avoiding any slowdown in the growth of wind power as an alternative to carbon-emitting fossil fuels—a key piece of President Joe Biden's climate agenda. It comes after several major utilities have been federally prosecuted in recent years for [killing large numbers of eagles without permits](#).

The federal government already issues permits to kill [eagles](#). But Thursday's proposal calls for new permits tailored to wind-energy projects, power line networks and the disturbance of breeding bald eagles and bald eagle nests.

Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams said the new program would provide "multiple pathways to obtain a permit" while also helping conserve eagles, which she described as a key responsibility for the agency.

Bald eagle numbers have quadrupled since 2009 to about 350,000 birds. There are only about about 40,000 [golden eagles](#), which need much larger areas to survive and are more inclined to have trouble with humans.



Eagle researcher Charles "Chuck" Preston carries a young golden eagle that was temporarily removed from its nest as part of research related to long-term population studies of the birds, on June 15, 2022 near Cody, Wyo. The Biden administration is proposing a new permitting program for wind energy turbines, power lines and other projects that kill bald and golden eagles. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Brown, File

The number of wind turbines nationwide more than doubled over the past decade to almost 72,000, according to U.S. Geological Survey data, with development overlapping prime golden eagle territory in states including Wyoming, Montana, California, Washington and Oregon.

In April, a subsidiary of the Florida-based utility industry giant NextEra Energy pleaded guilty in federal court in Wyoming to criminal violations



of wildlife protection laws after its wind turbines killed more than 100 golden eagles in eight states. It was the third conviction of a major wind company for killing eagles in a decade.

Federal officials won't divulge how many eagles are reported killed by wind farms, saying it's sensitive law enforcement information.

Nationwide, 34 permits in place last year authorized companies to "take" 170 golden eagles—meaning that many birds could be killed by turbines or lost through impacts on nests or habitat, according to permitting data obtained by The Associated Press. More than 200 permits were in place to allow the killing of 420 bald eagles, according to the data.



Bradley University professor Anant Deshwal points to cliffs where golden eagles are nesting in Cody, Wyo., on June 15, 2022. The Biden administration is

proposing a new permitting program for wind energy turbines, power lines and other projects that kill bald and golden eagles. Credit: AP Photo/Emma H. Tobin, File



Ecologist Bryan Bedrosian with the Teton Raptor Center prepares to return a young golden eagle to its nest after banding the bird for future tracking as part of a long-term population study of the species, on Wednesday, June 15, 2022 near Cody, Wyo. Scientists say U.S. golden eagle populations are teetering on the brink of decline as deaths from wind turbines, illegal shootings, lead poisoning and other causes take a toll on the species. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Brown





Power lines stand near hills outside Cody, Wyoming on Wednesday, June 15, 2022. The region is ground zero in the conflict between golden eagles and wind energy, which both find homes in areas where there are strong winds. As wind turbines proliferate, scientists say deaths from collisions could drive down golden eagle numbers considered stable at best and likely to drop in some areas. Credit: AP Photo/Emma H. Tobin



The talons of a six-week-old young golden eagle are seen as the bird's feet are held by Charles "Chuck" Preston during research work at a nesting site, on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, near Cody, Wyo. The recent criminal conviction of a wind energy company for illegal eagle killings in Wyoming underscored the clash between renewable energy to fight climate change and efforts to preserve the iconic western U.S. species. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Brown

For each loss, companies are responsible for ensuring at least one eagle death is avoided somewhere else.

Illegal shootings are the biggest cause of death for golden eagles, killing about 700 annually, according to federal estimates. More than 600 die annually in collisions with cars, [wind turbines](#) and [power lines](#); about 500 annually are electrocuted; and more than 400 are poisoned.

Yet climate change looms as a potentially greater threat: Rising temperatures are projected to reduce golden eagle breeding ranges by more than 40% later this century, according to a National Audubon Society analysis.

"Birds tell us that climate change is the biggest threat they face," said Garry George, director of the National Audubon Society's Clean Energy Initiative. If it's executed responsibly, he said the new program could strengthen protections for eagles as renewable energy expands.

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