



Federal Natural Resource Law and the Intersection of Renewable Energy Development

UT LAW CLE Studio Webcast

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Introduction

- Even “green” energy can have certain impacts on natural resources and may require permitting or other compliance strategies.
- This presentation covers the federal natural resource laws and how they intersect with land-based renewable energy development.



FEDERAL NATURAL RESOURCE LAWS

- Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA)
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA)
- Clean Water Act (CWA)
- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)



Endangered Species Act

- Administered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service
 - USFWS relevant for land-based and freshwater species
- Prohibits take of endangered species (Section 9)
 - Take can result from habitat impacts or from direct impacts
- Two ways to obtain authorization for take that may occur incidental to renewable energy development
 - Section 7 (Consultation) – federal nexus required
 - Section 10 (HCPs) – private actions on non-federal lands
- Violations of ESA can result in criminal or civil penalties
- Citizen suit provision in ESA section 11(g)

Take Prohibition

- Take: Defined by ESA section 3 to mean “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.”
- “Harm” has been defined by regulation (50 CFR 17.3) to mean:
 - an act which actually kills or injures wildlife. Such act may include significant habitat modification or degradation where it actually kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding or sheltering.

Incidental Take Authorization

- **Section 7 (Consultation) – federal nexus present**
 - Federal action agency must evaluate effects of its action (permit issuance, funding, etc.) on listed species and ensure against jeopardy.
 - Can be an informal or formal consultation.
 - If agency concludes that federal action is likely to adversely affect listed species or critical habitat, formal consultation is required and the USFWS will prepare a biological opinion.
 - If effects will result in incidental take, USFWS can issue an incidental take statement (ITS).
 - ITS authorizes take of listed species and sets forth conservation measures to minimize the impacts of take.
 - For hard-to-detect species, the burden to quantify take can be expensive.
 - Fourth Circuit has recently invalidated biological opinions for pipelines on the grounds that the quantification was not specific enough for bats and other species.
 - Often involves mitigation costs even though mitigation is not required or even mentioned in Section 7.
 - Consultation timeframe is 135-days, sort of.

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