

Wrecking Biodiversity

Environmental activist groups claim they are trying to save the planet by changing how we produce and use energy. But are they really? The activists are focused on carbon dioxide emissions which may... or may not... be a problem. At the same time, they often ignore the environmental consequences of putting wind turbines and solar panels in ever-shrinking areas of high biodiversity.

The reality is that wind turbines and solar arrays take up enormous amounts of land, far more than conventional power plants. And the expansion of renewables is rapidly moving into biologically sensitive areas, which fractures wildlife habitat and endangers threatened species.

A new study, published in *Global Change Biology*, explains that growing renewable development is impacting three categories of sensitive biodiversity. The numbers are concerning. The current and future developments are—or will be—degrading 886 protected areas, 749 Key Biodiversity Areas and 40 wilderness areas.

The study's authors claim that the coming wave of wind, solar, and hydropower development could compromise these important regions by an astounding 60 percent. This is important because these biodiverse regions are home to large cross-sections of threatened species along with birds and bats. That's a big sacrifice for installing technologies that only provide about 2 percent of the world's energy supply.

The spread of industrial wind and solar development into sensitive areas is currently most prevalent in Western Europe. But future expansions are moving into Southeast Asia and Africa, where biodiversity is more concentrated and valuable to the planet's health. Additionally, these regions, as well as the Middle East, lack strong land-use planning that helps reduce impacts.

The inherent problem with all renewables is they lack energy density. Because they must capture energy from the wind and sun, they are inefficient in turning that energy into usable electricity. Therefore, they take up a lot more land than coal, natural gas, and nuclear power. In fact, wind and solar require far more land than the study's authors have estimated because of a flaw in the researcher's assumptions.

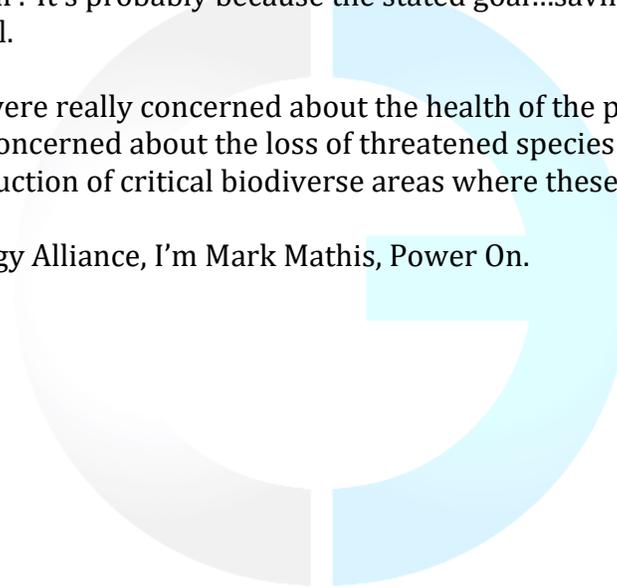
The study claimed that renewables require "up to ten times more land area than fossil fuel thermal facilities." But more detailed analysis suggests the real land use difference is much larger than that. Physicist David MacKay, author of "Sustainable Energy," estimated wind turbines require 700 times more land to produce the same amount of energy as oil and natural gas drilling. Energy author Robert Bryce calculates we would need 1,300 times as much land from wind power to replace electricity generated by only one 2,000-megawatt nuclear power plant.

The International Energy Agency projects global energy consumption will grow by 50 percent in the next 30 years. Most of the growth will happen in Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the key areas of biodiversity concern.

How can Eco-activist groups be so blind to the problem of land use that comes with wind and solar? It's probably because the stated goal...saving the planet... isn't the actual goal.

If activist groups were really concerned about the health of the planet, they would be greatly concerned about the loss of threatened species and the unnecessary destruction of critical biodiverse areas where these species live.

For the Clear Energy Alliance, I'm Mark Mathis, Power On.



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