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Suit Filed to Protect One of Nevada's Largest Bat Roosts, National Park

LAS VEGAS— Two conservation groups and three American Indian tribes filed [suit](#) today to protect a pristine mountain valley adjacent to Great Basin National Park in Nevada from a poorly-sited, 8,000-acre industrial wind energy project approved by the Department of the Interior with minimal environmental review. The valley is home to rare and imperiled wildlife such as the greater sage grouse, as well as sensitive species like golden eagles and free-tailed bats. The project area is also a sacred site to Western Shoshone tribes.

"We hope this litigation will lead the federal government to choose less-damaging locations for wind power developments," said Jon Marvel, executive director of Western Watersheds Project, one of the parties in the suit.

"Renewable energy is nationally and globally important for addressing the growing threats from climate change," said Rob Mrowka, an ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity, another lawsuit party. "But renewable projects must be properly located with careful consideration of natural values — not only those of the site, but also those of the surrounding area."

On Oct. 15, 2010, the Bureau of Land Management approved a proposal by Spring Valley Wind, LLC, a subsidiary of Pattern Energy of San Francisco, to construct the project on public lands in northeastern Nevada, just north of Great Basin National Park. The BLM approved the project over the objections of state and federal wildlife officials, nearby tribes and conservation groups. Rather than carrying out a detailed review involving the preparation of an environmental impact statement, the BLM instead prepared only a cursory environmental assessment.

"The best ways to avoid negative impacts with renewable energy projects are to carry out a thorough environmental review and site them carefully. Unfortunately, in this case the BLM did neither," said Mrowka.

Today's lawsuit seeks to overturn the BLM's approval of the Spring Valley project until a new and sufficient environmental impact statement has been completed. In addition to the two conservation groups, plaintiffs include the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, the Duckwater Shoshone tribe and the Ely Shoshone tribe.

Perhaps the most critical negative impact of the project will be its effects on the million Mexican free-tailed bats that roost in the Rose Guano Cave near the project area. This cave is one of the most important known bat roosts in the Great Basin. A growing body of science demonstrates that wind turbines can kill bats by the thousands through a phenomenon known as "barotrauma," in which the pressure difference created by wind-turbine blades causes bats' lungs to explode.

"Biologists believe that the populations of bats that roost in Rose Guano Cave may migrate from Texas, Mexico and beyond," said Katie Fite of Western Watersheds Project. "The impact of this wind farm on these bats will negatively affect these bats' important role in ecosystems all over the Southwest."

Golden eagles and other bird species that inhabit or migrate through Spring Valley are also put at risk by the project, as wind turbines are known to kill or dismember birds that collide with turbine blades.

"While there is certainly a place for wind energy in Nevada, Spring Valley is about the worst place to put a project of this scale," said Fite.

Plaintiffs Western Watersheds Project and Center for Biological Diversity will be represented by Advocates for the West, a Boise-based environmental law firm.

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