

ENVIRONMENT | Avian populations in steep decline

Energy production takes toll on birds, report says

CAUTION URGED IN PUSH FOR GREEN SOURCES

Associated Press

WASHINGTON - As the Obama administration pursues more homegrown energy sources, a new government report faults energy production of all types - wind, oil and mountaintop coal mining - for contributing to steep drops in bird populations.

The first-of-its-kind government report chronicles a four-decade decline in many of the country's bird populations and provides many reasons for it, from suburban sprawl to the spread of exotic species to global warming.

In almost every case, energy production is also playing a role.

"Energy development has

significant negative effects on birds in North America," the report concludes.

Birds can collide with wind turbines and oil and gas wells, and studies have shown that some species, such as prairie chickens and sage grouse, will avoid nesting near the structures.

Ponds created during the extraction of coal-bed methane gas breed mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus, leading to more bird deaths. Transmission lines, roads to access energy fields and mountaintop removal to harvest coal can destroy and fragment birds' living spaces.

Windmills that dot hillsides in California, such as Altamont Pass near Livermore, kill birds by the hundreds that fly into them.

Environmentalists and scientists say the report should signal to the Obama adminis-

tration to act cautiously as it seeks to expand renewable energy production and the electricity grid on public lands and tries to harness wind energy along the nation's coastlines.

The report also shows that conservation efforts can work. Birds that reside in wetlands and the nation's waterfowl have rebounded over the past 40 years, a period marked by increased protections for wetlands.

"We need to go into these energies with our environmental eyes open," said John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took the lead in creating the report, which was drafted by the Cornell Lab along with nonprofit advocacy groups.

The report did not indicate whether one form of energy production is more detrimental than the other.

