

Wildlife Directives for Alberta Renewable Energy Projects: Frequently Asked Questions

The Government of Alberta recently released two wildlife directives to guide wildlife and wildlife habitat application considerations for wind and solar energy projects in Alberta. These policies are the “Wildlife Directive for Alberta Wind Energy Projects” and “Wildlife Directive for Alberta Solar Energy Projects”.

The following outlines answers to frequently asked questions about these directives.

1. Who regulates the renewable energy industry?

- The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) is the regulator for all electricity generators, including the wind and solar industries.
- The AUC is an independent, quasi-judicial agency of the province of Alberta. The AUC, in its facilities mandate, regulates power plants to ensure they are sited, constructed, altered, operated and decommissioned in the public interest, considering the social, economic and environmental effects.
- The information requirements for a wind or solar application are outlined in [AUC Rule 007: Applications for Power Plants, Substations, Transmission Lines, Industrial System Designations and Hydro Developments](#) and in [AUC Rule 012: Noise Control](#).

2. Why are Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) wildlife biologists involved in the review of wind and solar energy facilities?

- Wind and solar energy projects have both direct and indirect impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat. These impacts can be categorized as:
 - Direct mortality - facilities can directly cause mortalities to birds and bats, primarily by collisions or in the case of wind energy, barotrauma (barotrauma refers to injuries to bats caused by changes in air pressure).
 - Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation - development results in direct habitat alterations which can directly impact habitat quality and quantity.
 - Disturbance - recent research has indicated that avoidance of renewable energy facilities by wildlife increases threats to at-risk wildlife populations.
- For more detailed information please refer to the online [directives](#).

3. What is the role of the AEP wildlife biologist in the review of wind and solar energy facilities?

- The directives focus on avoiding key wildlife habitat and standard mitigation (i.e., steps taken or tools used to reduce or avoid wildlife impacts) identified by AEP.
- The proponent will conduct desktop siting work and pre-application wildlife surveys to determine the potential risk of the proposed development to wildlife.
- Avoidance and standard mitigation options are applied as necessary to reduce the risk of the development to wildlife and wildlife habitat.
- As stated in AUC Rule 007, a Renewable Referral Report is required from AEP for any wind or solar energy applications. The wildlife biologist reviews that application and provides a referral report outlining how consistent the project proposal is to the appropriate directive. This letter must form part of the application to the AUC. If the applicant is unable to obtain a

referral letter or cannot agree to a mitigation plan with the wildlife biologist, the application must include details explaining the situation.

4. What do the directives apply to?

- The directives apply to all new wind or solar energy project applications that fall under AUC Rule 007.
- The directives guide the AEP review process.

5. Do the directives apply to any other industry?

- No, the directives are specific to the wind and solar energy industry respectively.
- For wildlife guidelines, directives and processes that apply to other industrial activities please refer to the AEP website or contact the local AEP Wildlife Office.

6. Do the directives replace the AEP Wildlife Guidelines for Alberta Wind Energy Projects and the Wildlife Guidelines for Alberta Solar Energy Projects?

- Yes, the directives replace the 2011 Wind Energy Guidelines and the 2016 Solar Energy Guidelines.
- For wind or solar energy projects that were initiated prior to the release of the directives, please refer to the related [Grandfathering Administrative Procedures](#).

7. What is the difference between standards and best management practices?

- Standards - provide siting, timing and site-related wildlife conservation requirements that must be met in the planning and development of a wind or solar energy facility. All standards in the directives are preceded by the number 100 (e.g., 100.1.4).
- Best Management Practices (BMP) - provide information and considerations for the planning of wind or solar energy facilities to support better conservation and protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat. All BMPs in the directives are preceded by the number 200 (e.g., 200.3.8).

8. What if my project does not meet a standard as outlined in the directives?

- The standards outlined in the directives must be adhered to unless there is a justified site-specific constraint that conflicts directly with the standard.
 - In these cases, the applicant must identify the issue, justify the rationale and propose alternative mitigation to AEP.
 - AEP will review this proposed deviation and determine if the rationale and alternative mitigation will meet the intent of the directives.
 - AEP will provide a response through the AEP Referral Report that is submitted as part of the application to the AUC. The AUC will assess the review by AEP and any comments provided by the applicant in its public interest assessment.
- Projects that adhere to the standards outlined in the directives will move through the AEP review process quickly as there will be fewer delays to deal with the deviations.

9. Why are some wildlife standards different for the wind and solar energy industries compared to other industries in Alberta?

- Wildlife standards are designed to mitigate the risk to specific wildlife species from a specific industry.

- The standards outlined in the directives are based on the best available scientific research.
- The standards outline what constitutes adequate avoidance or mitigation to reduce or limit the risk to wildlife from wind and solar energy facilities.

10. What are the wind energy checklists?

- The wind energy checklists outline the information needed for the AEP wildlife biologist to facilitate the AEP review process referred to in AUC Rule 007.
- [Checklists](#) can be found online.

11. Which wind energy checklist do I use for my wind energy project?

- Renewable Energy External Wind Checklist A is applicable to wind energy projects that follow AUC wind application types in which:
 - A standard application where no changes are anticipated after filing;
 - An application where changes in turbines or layout are anticipated after filing; and
 - An application that indicates more turbine locations than are necessary for the wind power plant.
- Renewable Energy External Wind Checklist B is applicable for to the Buildable Area AUC application as described within AUC Rule 007.

12. What about other environmental risks? Does the Directive cover other AEP referral processes?

- The AEP -Wildlife process is a separate process and does not replace the need for other AEP referrals. The focus of the Directive is wildlife and wildlife habitat; all other issues will be addressed through other existing processes. The proponent needs to ensure they are compliant with these processes.
 - For example, if a wetland is being disturbed the proponent would need to have approval under the AEP Alberta Wetland Policy.

13. Who in AEP do I contact about my wind project?

For all wildlife related referrals please contact the [local AEP Wildlife Office](#)