



From the desk of:
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Date: June 16, 2005

To: Mr. James P. Sherron
Executive Director Steuben County IDA
PO Box 393
Bath, NY 14810-0393

**Subject: Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement by Ecogen, LLC for
Prattsburgh/Italy Wind Farm**

Dear Mr. Sherron,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors for the Braddock Bay Bird Observatory concerning the recent EIS issued for the Prattsburgh/Italy Wind Farm. In addition to myself, the Board of Directors for BBBO consists of:

David Bonter, Ph.D., Vice President

Bob McKinney, Treasurer

Linda Boutwell, Secretary

Directors Elizabeth Brooks, Richard Marx, and Cindy Marino

All BBBO Board members are trained ornithologists with extensive knowledge about local breeding and migratory birds. In addition, the Board has considerable expertise in methodologies and techniques used to assess and census breeding and migratory bird use of the local landscape (e.g. radar, breeding and migratory bird surveys, bird banding, population demographic, etc).

BBBO's Board of Directors was surprised and shocked to see our organization's data used in Ecogen's EIS. We were not informed or consulted about the use of our data and, furthermore, we were not sent a copy of the draft EIS to review. We found out about the use of our data and our organization's name in this EIS only second hand. In 2004 we were approached by Ecogen to conduct a migratory bird survey in the Prattsburgh/Italy area. The board refused to take part in the survey largely on the grounds of improper methodology, which seems to be prevalent in many of the studies conducted as part of this EIS. It was requested that we provide an expert to survey migratory birds for only 8-10 total days during the migratory season. Migration monitoring requires intensive daily surveys due to the variable and stochastic nature of migration within any given area. Migratory birds depend on weather patterns and prevailing winds for migratory flights. Daily and yearly variation in weather can cause large variations in the timing of migration affecting when birds will be present in any given area. Even during a "normal" year at Braddock Bay, we find large daily variation in the numbers of migrants in our study area. Days with few numbers of birds can be interspersed with days with extremely high numbers of birds. So surveying randomly during migration could easily lead to large misestimates of numbers of birds utilizing a given area during migration. On these grounds, we refused to take part in Ecogen's specified survey on the proposed area.

The authors of the document proceeded to use data that our organization collected at our field site on the south shore of Lake Ontario in Greece, NY. We were not asked or, more importantly, consulted about the use of this data. I can only assume it was gleaned from our public website (www.bbbo.org), where we publish our weekly totals of birds banded for each season. Our field site is over 60 miles from the proposed wind farm site and is in completely different habitat. We band nocturnal migrants that stop at Braddock Bay during their migration using a strict intensive protocol, also found on our website at www.bbbo.org/research/index.html. The numbers of birds caught in our area can only be used to determine habitat use of the Braddock Bay complex by migrants within the constraints of our sampling protocols. The data cannot be used to state specifics, as done in the EIS, about the migrant habitat use in the Finger Lakes region. Two large flaws in interpretation of the data collected by BBBO are based on misunderstanding by the authors of the EIS. These misinterpretations could have been avoided had the authors consulted our Board of Directors or our Committee on Research (which consist of 5 Ph.D. holding ornithologists from SUNY Geneseo and Brockport, Canisius College, Cornell University, and Hobart & William Smith Colleges).

First, on page 3-24 of the EIS, the authors state “bird banding stations provide a good sample of the number and species of birds that pass through an area during spring and fall migration.” This statement is inaccurate. Bird banding stations provide a good estimate of habitat use by nocturnal migrants during diurnal stop over at the banding sites. Many birds may pass over but not stop during the day or the birds may be in different habitats than where our banding efforts are focused. A good example of this is migrating hawks in the Braddock Bay region. Thousands of hawks pass over, but few are banded because they do not stop at the site during the daytime banding operation conducted by BBBO and Braddock Bay Raptor Research. Hawks, unlike passerine birds, migrate during the day. Likewise, many nocturnal migrants may pass over Braddock Bay in favorable nighttime weather conditions and stop at locations beyond Braddock Bay the following morning. In addition, we have operated many double height mist nets over the past few years and our data show that many birds are caught at heights higher than most of our nets. So our data must be interpreted cautiously with respect to our protocol for capturing and banding birds and the habitat and location in which we band. While our data may demonstrate some of the species that would be potentially threatened by the wind farm installation, it is more important for Ecogen to determine which birds use their area for stopover and how turbines and habitat destruction could influence birds as they fly over the area or stop during the daytime in the area.

Second and related to this last point, on page 3-25 of EIS, the authors state that the number of birds expected at the proposed wind farm site would be less than at Braddock Bay because Braddock Bay is a known stopover site. This may or may not be true and may depend on daily and yearly variation in weather patterns. Not much is known about the number of birds that stop at more inland sites in central NY because banding stations, such as the one we operate, at Braddock Bay do not exist at inland sites in NY (with the exception of Kestral Haven, which uses different protocols than ours). Long-term inland banding studies are needed during migration in order to determine if our data are similar to patterns of habitat use by migrants at locations away from the lakeshore. Long-term studies are key due to yearly variation in weather patterns and temporal and geographic variation in migration. For instance, this year’s spring

overall numbers of migrants were lower than previous years for most days due to prevailing north winds off Lake Ontario. Many birds migrated through the region at much later dates than in most spring seasons. These birds may have been at more inland sites for a longer period this year due to weather conditions. Reports from several personal contacts do suggest that many passerine species were in more southern locations for longer periods this spring. In conjunction with John Waud at the Rochester Institute of Technology, we have operated a banding site during migration on the RIT campus for several seasons. The numbers of birds and species found at each site vary considerably, which attest to the importance of site-specific surveys and analyses.

In short, use of BBBO data in the EIS is highly questionable and must be interpreted much more cautiously. BBBO data should not be used to make any definitive decision about habitat use during migration at the proposed site in Italy and Prattsburgh. Only a *long-term, site-specific, intensive* monitoring protocol would yield reliable data about the use of the proposed site by birds during migration. Broad, sweeping statements about the implications of our data are unsubstantiated and must be approached with a skeptical attitude until proper migratory surveys provide evidence for larger landscape patterns of migration.

In addition to our concerns about the improper use of and unsubstantiated conclusions from BBBO data, there are several other errors and unanswered questions in the EIS regarding other studies.

- First of all on several pages (e.g. 3-15) the authors indicate that data were provided by “knowledgeable birders”. Who are these birders? What are their qualifications and on what evidence are their statements based? A prominent, knowledgeable birder and master bander who conducted breeding bird surveys in the area is also one of our board members. Bob McKinney was not consulted on the report and has found several discrepancies and errors in the data. Bob is sending his own letter with comments about these discrepancies to your organization. I have included a copy of this letter for your convenience.
- On page 3-29 the authors state that NEXAD data from Buffalo and Binghamton clearly indicate that a large portion of the fall migration passed around Lake Ontario, avoiding the Project area. This statement directly conflicts with the data from BBBO cited on page 3-25 of the EIS. BBBO bands larger numbers of migrants during the fall migration than during the spring migration. Because we band with same protocol each season, this difference does not reflect different effort. Effort is standardized and clearly more birds stop at Braddock Bay during fall migration. Moreover, David Bonter (Vice President for BBBO and Head of Project Feeder Watch at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology) has conducted extensive radar surveys of migratory birds in the Great Lakes region. His data (currently being prepared for publication in a scientific journal) clearly show that passerines fly over Lake Ontario in the fall. The only birds that would fly around the lake would be raptors, which avoid flying over water during migration. Please feel free to contact David about his radar studies (dnb23@cornell.edu). A glaring error in the radar study by ABR (page 3-29) is the timing of the study. Radar was only observed through Sept 29, 2004. A quick look at our data from the fall of 2004 (see

www.bbbo.org/banding/2004/fall/table.html) or any other fall will show that half of the total birds caught that fall were caught in October. The radar study missed out on at least half of the fall migration! This type of error in a manuscript for scientific publication would not be tolerated. It demonstrates either a total lack of knowledge about migration by ABR or an attempt to directly mislead the public about the potential threats of the wind farm on migrants in the area. This point makes me most skeptical about this EIS. If such a large error or purposeful mistake were made in this study, where else were corners cut or mistakes made?

- Insufficient information is provided about the methodology for the daytime field surveys reported on pages 3-23 to 3-24. Length of the daily surveys and time of day for surveys are not indicated, both important factors in interpreting the findings. Without timing information, no estimate of effort can be inferred by the reader. In any population survey an estimate of effort must be provided in order to interpret the findings correctly. Yet again questionable and flawed methodology was used in the studies used for the EIS. Moreover, these surveys were not started early enough in spring. Many local breeding passerines are on nests as early as April or May and some even earlier. Rick Marx, a BBBO board member and resident of Italy, NY, has observed crows, robins, ravens, and killdeer on nests in NYSDEC Hi Tor Wildlife Management Area as early as late March. In addition, Rick has observed raptors (such as Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls), woodcocks, and Canada Geese nesting on his own property by early April.
- On page 3-25 the authors state that BBBO is well known for its large raptor flights. Yes, Braddock Bay is known for its large raptor flights during migration. However, our organization does not track raptor flights. We only band a few Sharp-shinned Hawks each season. Braddock Bay Raptor Research (BBRR) conducts hawk counts and banding efforts at Braddock Bay. BBRR should be consulted about the use of their data in the report.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the information contained within this letter of the opinion of the board of directors for BBBO in this matter. Please feel free to contact me at my place of employment, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, using the contact information given below.

Sincerely,

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