



## Deadly Combination

**Bats clash with wind projects / by Brooke Edwards / STAFF WRITER / Daily Press**

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The endangered desert tortoise and Mojave ground squirrel are frequent headlines in the local environmental debate whenever developers seek a piece of the High Desert.

Now scientists are saying another population that's not quite so lovable also needs an advocate — and particularly as it comes up against the dozens of companies looking to convert the region's abundant breezes into renewable energy.

"Dead bats are turning up beneath wind turbines all over the world," a report from the United States Geological Survey states, with thousands found dead at just a few monitored sites each year.

Aside from migrating bat populations colliding with the massive rotating blades, recent studies have shown that bats can die just by flying near a turbine, with reduced air pressure causing bats' delicate lungs to explode.

And with bats already ranked among the country's most endangered wildlife, many experts are questioning whether we're just trading one environmental offense for another.

"Green does not, by definition, aid in the extinction of a species," said Matthew Huffine, a science coordinator for the Academy for Academic Excellence run by the Lewis Center for Educational Research in Apple Valley, who has studied local bat populations.

Bats were not mentioned as a concern during a recent presentation from RES Americas, as the energy company looks to place 28 turbines along the ridge of Granite Mountain, east of Apple Valley.

Though some eight species of bats were found to colonize or migrate through the project area, an official from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management told the Press Enterprise that bats are not expected to stall the Granite Mountain project.

One problem, Huffine said, is very little is understood about the behavior of bats compared to many other mammals.

The USGS reports that bats collide with wind turbines more often than they do with other tall structures, leading some scientists to investigate whether there isn't something about the turbines that actually attracts bats.

A common factor that has been linked with a high percentage of fatalities is that bats appear most likely to die from encounters when wind speeds are low, which is when bats were shown most likely to approach the towers.

A study presented last year by the Bats and Wind Energy Cooperative showed bat deaths could drop by up to 92 percent if energy companies simply turn turbines off when winds slow down.

But wind turbines are just one of a slew of problems threatening to wipe out the bat population, according to Huffine.

"In our generation, by 2050, bats are on their way out unless human populations decline or we decide to quit fragmenting their habitats and disrupting their corridors," he said.

Huffine said the local bat population has been down significantly for the last seven years or so, simply because of the drought the region has been experiencing. Less water means less insects for bats to feed on, forcing them to migrate elsewhere to survive.

While bridges over the Mojave River at Interstate 15 and Highway 18 remain popular nesting spots, Huffine said there have been nowhere near the 10,000 bats previously reported at these sites.

That's likely why the 16 bat colonies Huffine and his students erected along the Mojave River near the Lewis Center have sat empty in the last few years, he said.

But when Apple Valley moves forward with constructing the planned Yucca Loma Bridge over the Mojave

Narrows, again disrupting the bats' natural habitat, Huffine said those artificial homes will be ready and waiting.

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