

Case Study 1: Nine Mile Creek Wind Project (Northeast BC)

Overview

The Nine Mile Creek Wind Project, located in northeastern British Columbia, is one of the newer wind energy developments advancing under the province's updated regulatory framework aimed at accelerating renewable energy projects.

Regulatory Context

This project is proceeding under the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act, which allows certain wind energy developments to move forward through streamlined permitting processes rather than a full review under the Environmental Assessment Act.

Ecological Context

The region includes:

- Intact boreal and grassland ecosystems
- Migratory bird pathways
- Habitat for large mammals and species at risk

Key Conservation Concerns

- Potential bird and bat mortality from turbine collisions
- Habitat fragmentation from roads, transmission lines, and turbine placement
- Limited publicly available baseline ecological data
- Uncertainty around cumulative effects with other regional developments

What's Missing / Unclear

- Whether ecological review matches the rigor of a full environmental assessment
- Transparency of data and monitoring plans
- Long-term cumulative effects analysis across the region

Why It Matters

This project reflects how newer regulatory pathways may enable faster project approvals while raising questions about whether ecological safeguards remain consistent in sensitive landscapes.

Case Study 2: Bear Mountain Wind Park (Dawson Creek)

Overview

The Bear Mountain Wind Park, near Dawson Creek in British Columbia, was the province's first large-scale wind energy facility and began operation in 2009.

Regulatory Context

Developed prior to recent legislative changes, the project underwent a more traditional environmental review process consistent with earlier provincial standards.

Ecological Context

The site includes:

- Mountain ridge ecosystems
- Wildlife corridors used by birds and mammals



Key Conservation Concerns

- Documented bird mortality from turbine collisions
- Habitat alteration from infrastructure development
- Ongoing questions regarding effectiveness of mitigation measures

What's Missing / Unclear

- Long-term monitoring transparency and publicly accessible data
- Full understanding of cumulative impacts over time

Why It Matters

Bear Mountain provides a useful baseline for comparison, illustrating how earlier wind projects were assessed and highlighting the importance of robust environmental review and long-term monitoring.

Case Study 3: Dokie Wind Farm (Near Chetwynd)

Overview

The Dokie Wind Farm, located near Chetwynd in northeastern British Columbia, is one of the province's early wind projects developed in partnership with First Nations.

Regulatory Context

The project was approved under earlier environmental assessment frameworks and reflects a model of Indigenous partnership within more traditional regulatory processes.

Ecological Context

The area includes:

- Forested ridge ecosystems
- Habitat for birds, bats, and large mammals

Key Conservation Concerns

- Wildlife disturbance and displacement
- Bird and bat mortality risks
- Habitat fragmentation associated with infrastructure

What's Missing / Unclear

- Long-term ecological monitoring results
- Accessibility of environmental performance data

Why It Matters

Dokie demonstrates that Indigenous participation in wind energy projects is not new. It provides important context showing that strong environmental assessments and Indigenous partnerships can coexist raising questions about how newer streamlined processes compare in terms of ecological rigor.

Across these examples, it is not Indigenous involvement itself that defines the level of environmental review, but rather the regulatory pathway applied. However, as newer streamlined processes are increasingly used often alongside Indigenous partnerships there is a need to ensure that environmental standards remain consistent, transparent, and science-based.



Wind turbines are known to pose risks to wildlife, particularly:

- Bird and bat mortality from turbine strikes
- Habitat displacement and avoidance behavior
- Fragmentation from roads, transmission lines, and infrastructure

Geographic Context

- Location:** Interior regions of British Columbia, often in high-wind areas
- Ecosystem:** Dry interior grasslands, shrub-steppe, and open forest ecosystems
- Habitat:** Some of the most endangered ecosystems in the province
- Protection Gap:** These ecosystems are significantly underrepresented in protected areas and are already under pressure from development, agriculture, and climate change

These landscapes are among the most at-risk ecosystems in BC, with limited intact habitat remaining. Development in these areas can result in disproportionate ecological impacts.

Cultural Context (First Peoples Impact)

First Nations are increasingly involved as partners, proponents, or rights-holders in renewable energy projects. This reflects efforts by the province to align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including recognition of Indigenous rights, title, and decision-making authority.

Some projects may incorporate Indigenous knowledge and stewardship practices. However, there is variability in how environmental review processes are applied, and not all Indigenous-led or partnered projects undergo the same level of publicly accessible assessment as traditional EAs.

This creates a complex policy space where reconciliation, economic development, and environmental protection must be carefully balanced.

Ecological Context

Wind energy development, while critical for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, is not without environmental impact. Key concerns include:

- Loss and fragmentation of critical habitat
- Disturbance to wildlife movement and breeding patterns
- Cumulative impacts when multiple projects occur within the same region
- Limited baseline data in some proposed development areas

Without comprehensive environmental assessments, there is concern that these impacts may not be fully understood or mitigated prior to project approval.

Conservation Significance

The issue highlights a growing tension between:

- Climate action (rapid expansion of renewable energy)
- Indigenous rights and economic participation
- Biodiversity conservation and habitat protection



For conservation organizations, the central concern is whether streamlined regulatory processes provide sufficient safeguards to protect species at risk and sensitive ecosystems.

Particularly at risk are:

- Rare grassland ecosystems
- Migratory bird pathways
- Critical habitats that are already underrepresented in protected areas

Scientific Context:

Environmental assessments traditionally provide:

- Baseline ecological data
- Species-at-risk surveys
- Cumulative effects analysis
- Mitigation and monitoring requirements

Alternative or streamlined processes may:

- Rely on more limited data
- Reduce opportunities for independent scientific review
- Limit transparency and public engagement

This raises questions about whether current approaches adequately address long-term ecological impacts, especially in areas with high conservation value.

Key Considerations / Gaps

- Lack of clarity on which projects are exempt vs. reviewed
- Limited transparency in alternative assessment processes
- Uncertainty around cumulative effects analysis
- Potential inconsistency in species-at-risk protections
- Insufficient publicly available data for decision-making

References

- Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act: <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/25012>
- Environmental Assessment Act: https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/93_2025
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- BC Government Release: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2025ECS0018-000397>
- BC Energy Regulator – Renewal Energy Framework: <https://www.bc-er.ca/energy-professionals/application-documentation/renewables>
- Permitting Reform for Renewable Energy Projects: <https://stikeman.com/en-ca/kh/canadian-energy-law/permitting-reform-for-renewable-energy-projects>
- BC Government Streamlines Renewable Energy Regulatory Process and Announces 2025 Call for Power: <https://www.bennettjones.com/Insights/Blogs/BC-Government-Streamlines-Renewable-Energy-Regulatory-Process-and-Announces-2025-Call-for-Power>
- ‘At what cost?’: wind energy projects now exempt from environmental assessments in B.C.: <https://thenarwhal.ca/wind-energy-exempt-environmental-assessment/>