

Eagle Protection and Offset Program

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A recent study found that the main anthropogenic causes of golden eagle mortality in the western US were shooting, collision, electrocution, poisoning, and trapping. This “take” of golden eagles can either be intentional (e.g., shooting) or incidental from otherwise lawful activities (e.g., collisions with wind turbines, electrocutions from power lines). Incidental take of golden eagles violates the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The US Fish and Wildlife Service can issue Eagle Incidental Take Permits to industry, such as wind energy developers, as long as compensatory mitigation to offset eagle mortality is implemented. Currently, the only mitigation accepted to offset any source of eagle incidental take is power pole retrofitting to reduce electrocutions. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has approved a mitigation bank for eagle incidental take developed by Burns & McDonnell, an engineering firm headquartered in Kansas City. NorthWestern Energy has partnered with Burns & McDonnell to provide the power pole retrofits needed to fulfill mitigation for eagle incidental take permittees. Power poles qualify for the Eagle Protection and Offset Program based on Relative Risk Index, presence of eagle habitat, history of eagle mortalities, location within Eagle Management Units, and cost. NorthWestern provided the first power pole credits for eagle incidental take in 2022.