The bird choppers finally get fined for killing eagles [1]

Written by Tim Worstall [2] | Monday 25 November 2013



Interesting news from across the pond [3]:

The U.S. government for the first time has enforced environmental laws protecting birds against wind energy facilities, winning a \$1 million settlement from a power company that pleaded guilty to killing 14 eagles and 149 other birds at two wind farms in the western state of Wyoming. The Obama administration has championed pollution-free wind power and used the same law against oil companies and power companies for drowning and electrocuting birds. The case against Duke Energy Corp. and its renewable energy arm was the first prosecuted under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act against a wind energy company. "In this plea agreement, Duke Energy Renewables acknowledges that it constructed these wind projects in a manner it knew beforehand would likely result in avian deaths," Robert G. Dreher, acting assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division, said in a statement Friday.

There is no possible method of having vast structures like these spinning away on the tops of hills without slicing up some number of birds. Which brings us to one of the great lessons that economics has to offer us.

There is no such thing as a solution: there are only a number of trade offs. You might indeed think that littering the countryside with bird choppers, with the attendant avian deaths, is a decent trade off to gain expensive electricity. Other might think that coal fired plant, with its mercury and radioactive pollution is a better bargian for cheap electricity. Or natural gas for slightly more expnsive but less polluting. Or nuclear, which has zero pollution except when things go very expensively wrong (although we should note that nuclear, even when it goes wrong, kills fewer than either solar or coal in normal operation). Or....well, or whatever.

Given that we always face trade offs it is the complete set of trade offs that need to be considered in any decision making process. Meaning that, yes, we do need to consider the impact of wind power on bird populations. The only regret is that that full set of trade offs wasn't considered before everyone started to build the bird choppers.

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