

# Tilting at Windmills

By Dean Wooton

*There they are. Dark harbingers of the future  
Spread across the ridge from horizon to horizon  
Slowly turning long arms, malevolent as giant spiders,  
Creeping toward eternity.*

They call wind turbines green and have won the energy wars without fighting a battle. It proves the power of words. In this case, only one: Green. But what's green about them? Lined up like imposing fences, whooshing and thumping, they are an almighty obstacle to animal movement. The quietly nodding oil pumps near Pinedale, Wyoming, are justly targeted for interfering with the migration of pronghorn and other animals, yet those oil rigs are relatively benign compared to the intimidating size, sprawl, movement, and noise of wind turbines, and why would BLM, state, and other land managers be more attentive to the placement of wind turbines than they are to oil wells?

And they are deadly. Going about their avian business, birds see space between the blades and think the sky is open. Even if they see the chopping blade descend, air falls out from under them as the blades suck them in to a fatal collision. Of course, birds routinely fly into stationary power lines and other objects, but wind turbines don't replace these; they and their power lines are an addition to the hazards we've already built for birds.

Just as important, wind turbines suck the life out of our land and the people who live on it and pass through it.

Since the 1970s, I've regularly driven across the vast interior of our country. I still love those driving trips, seeing the land. The land was not pristine even back in the seventies, but it was still rural. For mile after mile, there were only fences and open plains; mountains soared unobstructed in the distance. Occasionally, if I squinted, I could see a ranch house lost in the immensity of the land or a road slicing through to serve a distant community. Now, even in these early years of wind development, it's hard to travel across the interior without coming across wind farms littering the land for miles. Imagine the land in ten or fifteen years. Many decry the sprawl of cities into formerly rural lands and the creation of mini-ranches that break up the vastness of the plains, contribute to sprawl, and interfere with the movement of animals, yet how much more impact will this widespread, disruptive "green" industry impact our landscape and the wildlife it supports?

*Driving west they appear, rank upon rank, endless legions.  
Mile after mile they crowd, overpower, the land.  
At last this regiment deserts the rearview mirror  
But another emerges from the horizon, more hundreds.*

*A car pulls over. Travelers point and gawk.  
The spinning towers, elegant, slowly lift their arms  
To help satisfy our greed for power. Yet we forget  
How elegant the smokestacks of Pittsburgh once looked.*

No matter how many wind farms are built, they can never give us what we need: reliable, anytime energy; they're only supplemental. Wind turbines, and their cousins, solar panels, are only part-time sources, and they exact a steep price from our environment, given the minor upgrade they provide.



*When the wind doesn't  
blow, the arms rest,  
But the evil is rampant  
upon our land, and the damage  
is forever.  
We destroy our land to  
save the world, to save our  
guilt,  
But the land and our souls  
pay a lasting price for this  
answer.*

We need our landscape to feed our souls, our minds, our eyes, to preserve our American character. The West once provided that, and mostly still does, but that time is ending. We've turned our back on the land as though it no longer matters, zealously forgiving the damage caused by wind and solar power to satisfy our

unrepentant lust for energy.

These not-at-all green power sources aren't the answer; like hydroelectric power, they're another plague that will turn to bite us in the pants. The answer to climate change lies within ourselves, in purging ourselves of the excesses of energy consumption, in learning that bigger isn't better and that we already have more energy than we need. That doesn't mean doing without or downsizing our quest for a higher standard of living. It means establishing new paradigms for that standard of living—replacing wasteful, unnecessary SUVs and pickups with luxurious, appealing, and energy-efficient small cars; promoting well-appointed small homes instead of sprawling, inefficient middle-class mansions. There are answers to climate change; the problem is, we're pursuing the wrong ones.

DEAN WOOTEN lives in Santa fe, New Mexico



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- Edward Abbey

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who, each issue, manages to move *The Zephyr* into cyber-space, without causing the editor to have a nervous breakdown.



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**The federal government officially declared that marijuana has no accepted medical use and should remain classified as a dangerous and addictive drug. It will remain in the same class of drugs as heroin.**

**MSNBC**



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