

# The Day The Owls Left Amherst Island

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Owls as you know hunt by both sight and sound with heads and feather arrangements designed to hear the slightest rustling sound of their prey.

Wolfe Island naturalists have discovered owls have completely left the western end of the island where the turbines are operating.

It seems the noise of the turbines (described as airport-quality) drowns out their ability to hear and hunt. So owls leave for areas where they can hear and hunt successfully



**Short eared owl in flight over Amherst Island**

<http://brucedilabio.blogspot.com/2009/01/amherst-island-birrrrrrrrr-ding.html>

Here on smaller Amherst Island, the turbine distribution is going to make this island uniformly noisy. We can expect the owl population to leave here as well.

## **No more overwintering owls**

This is what we call unintended consequences. Build noisy turbines and the owls - who depend on having acute hearing in order to eat - leave.

## **Economic Consequences**

Those in the B&B business will be able to identify how much of their yearly income comes from the winter birders who come for the owls. This business and providing food or services for those visitors will also be eliminated (and this doesn't take into account any lowering of summer rentals based on too much noise with associated income reductions.)

Ferry ticket sales will also be reduced because of the lack of winter birders. Whatever fees these folks paid will have to be assumed by island residents.

## **Economic / Environmental Consequences**

Owls are top line predators taking voles, rabbits and other birds as their winter food. But what happens if you eliminate the owls?

Without predators to control them, we can expect a population explosion of voles, rabbits and indeed, without owls and other summer predators, (the red-tailed hawks for example were almost all killed by the turbines on the western end of Wolfe) we can expect more chipmunks and possibly squirrels to spread across the island.

With a growing food source in these small animals we can expect other top-line predators to increase in numbers. Coyotes, foxes and raccoons will likely see a greater population growth with such readily available food sources.

Livestock farmers will have to cope with the increased numbers of predators, particularly the increased coyote numbers. Raccoons and voles bring their own special "blessings" to country residents.

## **Bottom Line**

Build turbines and there are unintended consequences - unintended but still, they are going to arrive on the coat-tails of the wind.