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NEWS LOCAL

Wildlife carefully considered at solar site



By Julia McKay, Kingston Whig-Standard
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A bobolink.

There are four threatened or endangered birds whose habitat has been affected by the Kingston Solar site.

But in this case, it appears for the better.

They are the bobolinks, the barn swallow, the eastern meadowlark and the eastern loggerhead shrike.

According to Jolanta Kowalski, senior media relations officer for the Ministry of Natural Resources, the eastern loggerhead shrike, which is endangered, and the bobolink and eastern meadowlark, which are both threatened, have an overall benefit permit that will create and enhance more habitat than is impacted.

The impact on the barn swallow, which is threatened, is being mitigated through additional nesting habitat creation that is greater than the nesting habitat lost.

"There are no other known species at risk or other sensitive species affected at the site," Kowalski stated in an email.

When Kingston and the Islands MPP Sophie Kiwala took a guided tour of the Kingston Solar site last week, she asked questions about the economic and environmental effect the project is having on the region.

Jason Woods, Kingston Solar project director, explained how the planners took into consideration the varied species at risk, the wetlands and sensitive water courses before construction began on the site.

Kingston Solar, one of Canada's largest solar projects, is almost finished construction on its six zones located in Kingston's west end.

"The intent is to design a site that is of zero impact or impact neutral," Woods said. "A lot of thought and effort went into the permitting and the consultants engaged."

"The regulatory process for something like this takes about a year," Tim Smitheman, Samsung Renewable Energy Inc. communications manager, said. "We have what's called the REA, Renewable Energy Approval, and that's through the Ministry of the Environment and it's heavily linked with the Ministry of Natural Resources for species at risk and it's a fully permitting process for any renewable energy project."

The project has added barn swallow habitats along the north side of Zone 4.

"We did build bobolink habitat adjacent to here," Smitheman added. "It's a full process with the Ministry of Environment. They come walk through the site and figure out what we need to do."

Along with working with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ministry of the Environment, the project takes recommendations from local environmental groups such as the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority.

"Part of the renewal energy permit process is exactly that, working with consultants," Woods said. "They look at everything: species at risk, sensitive water courses, and that things like storm water runoff are managed. The intent is to design a site that is of zero impact or impact neutral. For example, this land always had water outflow at controlled points so the historical points are maintained in this design."

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