

# Pantex NEWS

MAINTAINING THE SAFETY, SECURITY AND RELIABILITY OF AMERICA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS STOCKPILE

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## **Pantex Hawk Study Breaks New Ground** *Effects of wind turbines studied by Pantex, WT, Texas Tech*

B&W Pantex is partnering with West Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University to conduct a groundbreaking study on the impact of wind farms on birds of prey in the Texas Panhandle.

The program uses radio transmitters and satellite receivers to track the movements of Swainson's Hawks. The recovered data will be compared to information gathered after the completion of the Pantex Renewable Energy Project (PREP) this fall to determine if the wind turbines affect the hawks, their environment and their home ranges.

"This study is a unique opportunity for Pantex to partner with two great schools – WT and Texas Tech – to examine an important subject for this area; the impact of wind energy on the environment," said B&W Pantex General Manager John Woolery. "We are committed to being good stewards of the environment, and this study aligns nicely with that commitment."

The study began last summer when Jim Ray, Pantex wildlife biologist, teamed up with researchers from WT and Texas Tech University to capture Swainson's Hawks, then fit them with tracking devices to determine their normal ranges. Swainson's Hawks are the most common birds of prey that nest in rural areas of the Texas Panhandle. Their large population in an area with growing numbers of wind farms mean they will serve as a strong indicator of the effect that wind turbines are having on birds in the environment.

Ray has teamed up with Dr. Ray Matlack and WT graduate student Jimmy Walker, a master falconer, to trap the hawks using two primary methods. In one, a trap is dropped near a hunting hawk, which swoops in and gets caught in the trap. The researchers also use a trained Great Horned Owl surrounded by nets to attract the hawks, which swoop in to defend their nests from the owl, a natural predator. In both cases, the birds are captured, hooded, examined and outfitted with transmitters, then released. The researchers also search out nests, having located more than a dozen on Pantex property and nearby lands, to track the number of offspring from the nesting hawks.

# The logo for Pantex NEWS. The word "Pantex" is written in a large, bold, red, italicized sans-serif font. A white orbital ring with a small grey sphere at its center orbits the letter "P". The word "NEWS" is written in a smaller, bold, black, sans-serif font to the right of "Pantex".

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By tracking the movement of the hawks and their overall health, the researchers will determine if installation of the new wind turbines degrade the quality of the birds' home ranges. If a hawk increases its range or moves into lower quality habitat, it would tend to indicate the wind turbines have had an impact.

Pantex is in a unique position to support the research. Much of the 18,000 acres of land on the plant remains in its natural state as short grass prairie, which is prime habitat for the hawks. With the support of the Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration, the researchers will have access to the area surrounding the five wind turbines of the PREP project that is often difficult to secure on private wind farms. Finally, the project matches well with the commitment at Pantex to protect the environment and team with other institutions, such as WT, to help facilitate important research in the Texas Panhandle.

"This really is a unique opportunity to get a before and after picture of how wind turbines affect these important animals," said Jim Ray, Pantex wildlife biologist. "We are hopeful that the results will greatly increase our understanding of the impact of wind energy."

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B&W Pantex manages and operates the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, Texas, for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration. B&W Pantex is also the proud recipient of the DOE's Voluntary Protection Program STAR status for safety excellence. The company was also named one of America's safest companies by Occupational Hazards magazine and has received numerous awards from the National Safety Council.