

Undersea cables unlikely to snare turbines

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A new federal study on the effects of submarine electric cables on marine wildlife should not delay a decision on the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm, according to an e-mail statement from the lead agency reviewing the project.

A formal "record of decision" necessary for Cape Wind Associates LLC to obtain a lease to build 130 wind turbines in the sound is "not tied to" the study of electromagnetic fields announced this week, U.S. Minerals Management Service spokesman John Romero wrote in the e-mail received yesterday by the Times.

MMS — a division of the Interior Department — released a final environmental report on Cape Wind in January that found negligible effects on fish and other marine wildlife from the electromagnetic fields.

The Cape Wind cables, which would measure less than 8 inches in diameter — not 8 feet as reported in a Times story yesterday — would be buried 6 feet beneath the ocean floor and be well insulated, according to Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers.

The Cape Wind decision could come within the next several months, according to statements made last week by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. The new study, which is expected to be complete by the fall of 2010, will build on information from the findings on the two 115-kilovolt cables that Cape Wind needs to connect the turbines to the electric grid, Romero wrote.

Submarine electric cables emit an electromagnetic field caused by the electrical charge and the flow of electric current. European studies of the effect of the field on fish and other marine wildlife have shown minimal impacts on behavior but there has been no similar work performed in the U.S., according to the environmental consulting firm hired to perform the \$250,000 study.

There are several undersea cables that already traverse Nantucket Sound to provide electricity to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. A pair of 46-kilovolt cables connect Nantucket to the electric grid while four 25-kilovolt distribution cables bring electricity to Martha's Vineyard.

The length and electrical rating of undersea cables are among the factors that could determine the potential impacts from the electromagnetic fields, Romero wrote.