



State sets locations for off-shore wind turbines

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A state plan to manage future renewable energy projects in coastal waters would put the kibosh on proposed large wind farms in Buzzards Bay but open up the possibility of as many as 10 turbines in the waters around Cape Cod and almost 170 turbines southwest of Martha's Vineyard.

"We're the first state in the nation to conduct such a comprehensive ocean management plan," Ian Bowles, state secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs, said during a teleconference yesterday. A draft of the plan is set for release to the public this morning, he said.

The ocean management plan is designed to identify areas in state waters that are suitable for development or require protection. State waters extend from 1,500 feet to three miles offshore.

Under the draft plan, development of any kind would be prohibited in the Cape Cod Ocean Sanctuary off the coast of the Cape Cod National Seashore, Bowles said.

He said there are two areas suitable for commercial wind energy projects of 11 or more turbines: southwest of the Elizabeth Islands and Nomans Land, a small island three miles off Martha's Vineyard that was once a Navy bombing range. Those areas could host up to 166 large turbines that could produce up to 600 megawatts of energy, according to the draft plan.

While developer Jay Cashman of Quincy-based Patriot Renewables could bid to build wind turbines in those areas, the three locations he has targeted off Naushon Island, Fairhaven and Dartmouth "would not be available for commercial scale wind development," Bowles said.

The Buzzards Bay sites Cashman wants to develop are ill-suited for large wind farms because of endangered roseate terns that nest in the bay and because of the busy marine traffic in the area, Bowles said.

Despite Bowles' assessment, Cashman said yesterday that the release of the draft plan is good news and a vindication of his contention that renewable energy projects could be developed in Buzzards Bay.

"I never actually came down with a definitive-sized project," Cashman said.

The developer noted that he has also submitted a permit to erect a wind data collection tower on Cuttyhunk Island. Cashman said that effort puts him in a good position to erect wind turbines at the mouth of Buzzards Bay, an area that the draft plan indicates is suitable for a commercial project.

Cape Wind plan unaffected

The draft ocean management plan does not have any impact on the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm, which would be located in federal waters if it is built. The proposal by Cape Wind Associates to build 130 turbines in the sound is currently waiting for federal approval.

The draft plan allows "community" wind energy projects but limits to 10 the number of turbines that could be sited adjacent to coastal areas represented by regional planning agencies such as the Cape Cod Commission.

On the Cape, officials representing towns that border Cape Cod Bay said they were unaware of any plans to build turbines off their shores.

"We certainly don't see that on the horizon at all right now," said Jon Fuller, chairman of the Orleans Board of

Selectmen.

The bay waters from Wellfleet Harbor to the Brewster flats are among the local areas where few conflicts between renewable energy projects and animal habitat are mapped.

Also seemingly clear of conflicts is an area north of Sandy Neck off the coast of Barnstable.

Town officials and the Cape Cod Commission would have to sign off on any projects in adjacent waters, Bowles said.

Officials on Martha's Vineyard said they were looking forward to more information on the plan and its impact.

"I'm glad that they were thinking along the lines of community wind development, but I wish they didn't limit that," said David McGlinchey, executive director of the Vineyard Energy Project, a nonprofit advocacy group for energy efficiency and renewable energy on the island.

"We believe very strongly that a community living with large wind turbines should also receive benefits from them," he said.

Gay Head tribe skeptical

The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head continues to work with the state on its own marine energy development concerns, according to tribal historic preservation officer Bettina Washington.

When asked during a meeting on the draft plan to indicate what areas around the Vineyard were culturally significant to the tribe, Washington said she drew a big circle around the entire island.

"This is such a unique area," she said yesterday. "There's nowhere else I can think of where you can see the sun rise out of the water and you can see the sun set on the water."

The tribe is sensitive to the region's need for clean, affordable energy, Washington said. "We just need to be careful culturally, aesthetically," she said.

What's next

- Five public hearings to be held after Labor Day
- Plan set to go into effect Jan. 1, 2010
- For more information, go to www.mass.gov/eea and click on Massachusetts Ocean Plan