



Vineyard seeks more control over wind farms

By **Patrick Cassidy**

pcassidy@capecodonline.com

September 22, 2009 12:11 PM

It's not that islanders are against wind farms, say Martha's Vineyard officials; they just want more control over what could happen off their shores.

In the state's offshore wind-energy plans, officials have proposed that areas southwest of the island could host up to 166 wind turbines, as well as potential smaller-scale wind projects. Then, there's the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm in nearby federal waters.

At the final public hearing on the state's draft ocean management plan tomorrow at the Katharine Cornell Theater in Vineyard Haven, islanders will get their chance to comment on the first-of-its-kind blueprint for waters from 1,500 feet to three miles from shore — the boundary of the state's jurisdiction. The plan, designed to protect certain areas while opening up other locations for uses such as renewable energy and utility projects, must be finalized by Dec. 31 under the Oceans Act of 2008.

Residents on the Vineyard may have even greater input if regional planners approve a proposal to secure more control over large-scale projects.

On Oct. 1, the island's regional planning and regulatory agency, the Martha's Vineyard Commission, will consider designating waters around the island out to the three-mile state limit, as well as much of the island's land mass, a "district of critical planning concern" or DCPC.

A DCPC is an area that covers more than one town and is protected from certain types of development. There are currently 25 such areas on the Vineyard, including three that are islandwide.

The designation would not be made in opposition to the state ocean management plan but rather would serve as a framework for islanders to have more say in the development of wind energy projects, said commission executive director Mark London.

A commission vote to accept a DCPC designation for consideration would be followed by a 60-day comment period and then a year-long moratorium on certain projects, which should expire well before any permits are requested for wind proposals in the area, London said. "It is not the intention of the commission to oppose the ocean plan," he said.

Islanders support offshore wind energy but they don't want it imposed on them, said David McGlinchey, executive director of the Vineyard Energy Project. McGlinchey's organization has proposed the creation of a cooperative that would own 17 2.5-megawatt offshore turbines that would help islanders generate 43 megawatts for their energy needs, he said.

The location of the cooperative's turbines would be up to the community, he said. "We're not tied to one specific location," he said, noting that the turbines could be in federal or state waters.

The island has shown an unusual level of unanimity in support of creating the DCPC, McGlinchey and other officials said yesterday.

"The Vineyard is bearing almost all of the brunt of commercial wind development in Massachusetts," said Tristan Israel, chairman of the board of selectmen in Tisbury and a Dukes County Commissioner. "We all want to do our part, but to me that is not fair."

Among other concerns, scenic impacts, which could prove devastating to the Vineyard's tourism and wedding-based businesses, were given "short shrift" in the state plan, Israel said.

With the 130-turbine Cape Wind project currently awaiting federal approval the island seems to be "getting it from both sides," Israel said. It also appears that the state missed an opportunity to create a plan that overlapped federal and state boundaries, he said.

Although he stressed that there were many good aspects in the state's plan, Israel found it unlikely that the Vineyard was the only location in the state where wind projects were possible, a sentiment echoed by other island officials.

"It is incomprehensible to me how the state could have looked at all the possible places for these turbines and decided that all of them needed to go right off the coast of one of the smallest towns on the island," said J.B. Riggs Parker, chairman of the Chilmark selectmen. "We're willing to take our share but not all of it."

State Rep. Timothy Madden, D-Nantucket, concurred, questioning, for example, the data on long-tailed ducks the state used to exclude Nantucket from consideration, even as that island hopes to move forward with renewable-energy projects of its own. "I think that is a problem," Madden said. "

State officials chose the waters off the Vineyard and not other areas based on a series of criteria, including water depth, species habitat, recreational activity and wind capacity, said Lisa Capone, spokeswoman for the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

An area off the North Shore was listed as provisional, for example, partially based on the number of boat trips — 1,500 per day — in the Merrimack River, she said.

The state continues to accept public input and comments from the island commission — which has a representative on the state's ocean advisory commission — on its draft plan, Capone said. "The hearing on Wednesday opens the conversation up some more," Capone said.

Final public hearing on state draft ocean management plan

6 p.m. tomorrow at Katharine Cornell Theater, 51 Spring St., Vineyard Haven

For more information on the state ocean

management plan go to www.mass.gov and search "Ocean Plan"