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Mitigation to tap Cape Wind's checkbook

2009

Written by Doreen Leggett

\$10M package outlined

Spinning blades aren't the only way Cape Wind will combat climate change. It will also do so with cash.

Cape Wind's \$10 million mitigation and monitoring program, detailed in the Minerals Management Service's Final Environmental Impact Statement, lays out a number of monetary measures the company will take to offset the effects of the 130-turbine wind farm in Nantucket Sound.

About half of the mitigation funds will come from the roughly \$5 million due to Massachusetts from Cape Wind's lease payments to MMS, representing 27 percent of the total.

A portion of the mitigation funds is targeted for natural resource preservation and public access improvements, some of which will likely deal with coastal erosion.

Mitigation monies will be used to supplement marine fisheries and habitat programs through Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management, including a coast-wide eelgrass study.

There will also be a five-year study of the socioeconomic impact of the wind farm on the fishermen and fisheries of the Sound. Concerns about the fishing culture of the Cape also prompted an agreement by Cape Wind to avoid in-water construction in Lewis Bay between Jan. 1 and May 31 to protect winter flounder.

As part of the mitigation, Cape Wind will pay \$780,000 toward restoration of Bird Island off Marion. The birds there are the same population subject to the potential impacts from the wind farm, the document states.

The project will attempt to restore portions of the island where erosion has destroyed the habitat of common terns, which have taken over the nesting areas of roseate terns, an endangered species. Threatened and endangered birds across the state, including piping plovers on the Lower Cape and Upper Cape, will also benefit from mitigation funds spent on predator control and increased staffing in the coastal waterbird program.

According to the report, Cape Wind has committed to a slew of steps to determine the wind farm's post-construction effect on local fish, bird and mammal populations. Twenty-five common terns, as stand-ins for roseates, will be outfitted with radio transmitters to see how they use Horseshoe Shoal. Twenty-five semi-palmated plovers, as stand-ins for piping plovers, will be tagged for the same reason.

Cameras and avian acoustic monitoring devices will be required on some turbines to see how the wind farm affects local populations. In addition, Cape Wind will pay for regular aerial surveys to see the impact on marine birds, such as black ducks, alcids and dovekies. Those species are supposed to be the most affected by the turbines.

Field biologists and National Marine Fisheries Service employees will be deployed regularly to monitor or study the site, and bat studies will be conducted.

Cape Wind Associates is also required to continue to consult with the

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Wampanoags, who have various concerns about the project. Post-construction monitoring, expected to cost hundreds of thousands if not millions, will continue for four years. Smaller measures, such as reducing the number of night-time lights from 260 to 57 and painting the turbines off-white, are also included in the mitigation program. Each turbine will be marked alpha-numerically as an aide to mariners.

In MMS's review of other wind farms it found that monitoring results show that with proper siting and placement, offshore wind farms pose a low risk to birds, mammals and fish. But the federal agency didn't want to generalize, and worked to put a number of safeguards in place.

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