

Coastal agency approves Cape Wind plan

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January 27, 2009 6:00 AM

Cape Wind Associates LLC has received another important state approval in its bid to build the country's first offshore wind farm.

The Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management issued two determinations Friday that the proposal to build 130 turbines in Nantucket Sound is consistent with its policies.

The findings by the agency responsible for balancing the impact of human activities with protection of the state's coastal and marine resources came exactly a week after the U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS) issued a crucial environmental report that found few negative impacts from the project.

The Coastal Zone Management Act allows states to have input on activities by the federal government — in this case a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers and a possible MMS lease for Cape Wind — that could affect the state's coastal areas.

If the state Energy Facilities Siting Board grants Cape Wind a composite certificate the company is seeking for several other state and local permits, the company would have completed all necessary state and local permitting, Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers said yesterday.

The siting board's decision could come within a month or two, Rodgers said. It could include a decision that would override a procedural denial of the wind farm cables by the Cape Cod Commission.

MMS still needs to issue a "record of decision" that would formalize its approval of a lease for the wind farm. Approvals from the Coast Guard and the Federal Aviation Administration also are still pending, Rodgers said. MMS must wait a month after issuing its final environmental impact statement before it can release a record of decision.

The project also needs a navigation permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Coast Guard approval is expected soon after the MMS record of decision, but the FAA approval could take longer and may come in the spring, Rodgers said.

Cape Wind president Jim Gordon said in a statement that he was pleased with the state's findings.

"This brings us one important step closer to making Massachusetts a leader in offshore renewable technology and bringing needed jobs and energy security to the region," he said.

The company's primary opponent, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, said yesterday that the determinations by Coastal Zone Management flew in the face of the agency's own policies and comments on the project.

"This is another example of politics over science and it's consistent with the state's stated support of Cape Wind, which appears to want to risk the safety and beauty of Nantucket Sound when there are more suitable sites," said Alliance executive director Audra Parker.

The agency had policies on energy, habitat, water quality and impacts on historic sites that these latest findings do not support, Parker said.

Cape Wind has spent \$40 million so far on the project, which is expected to cost more than \$1 billion and generate an average of 170 megawatts of energy, roughly equivalent to 75 percent of the demand on the Cape and Islands.

Gordon first proposed a wind farm in the Sound in 2001. The final environmental report released by MMS Jan. 16 found that most impacts from the project would be negligible or minor.