

# Wind farm adversaries have new foe in Salazar

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In saying the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm "makes sense" and appears to be a "good project," Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is stepping into the nearly decade-long debate over the contentious project with both feet.

Salazar's support for the plan by Cape Wind Associates LLC to build 130 wind turbines in the Sound is in line with President Barack Obama's call for more energy from renewable sources. But it did not sit well with opponents of the plan yesterday.

"We obviously think that Secretary Salazar, with all that he's doing, hasn't seen the complete picture," said Glenn Wattlely, president and CEO of the main anti-Cape Wind group, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound.

Salazar's position, stated in an AP interview published yesterday, is important because he must sign off on the project as the head of Interior, which oversees the U.S. Minerals Management Service. MMS is the lead federal agency reviewing Cape Wind. It released a largely favorable environmental report on the project in January. A formal record of decision that would allow Cape Wind to lease 25 square miles on the outer continental shelf could be released after a review of the project's impact on historic and Indian tribal properties is complete, an MMS spokesman said yesterday.

Salazar has yet to fill some key positions, including director of MMS and his assistant secretary, Wattlely said. Because he is getting much of his information straight from the MMS staff who put together the environmental report, he has received a positive spin on the wind farm, Wattlely said.

It was also unfortunate that Salazar had labeled the project as a case of "not in my backyard," a claim that trivializes the serious environmental and public safety issues involved, Wattlely said.

Despite his contention that Salazar's conclusion is premature, there was a "silver lining" in his call for "renewable energy zones" that raises the possibility of permanent protection for locations such as Nantucket Sound, Wattlely said.

Salazar's comments were praised by Cape Wind and the company's supporters.

"It's encouraging for just an entire industry that is looking to be launched just off the East Coast," said Barbara Hill, executive director of Clean Power Now, a group that supports Cape Wind.

"We could be realizing up to and probably more than 30,000 jobs for a new industry here," she said, adding that support and incentives from Obama's economic stimulus package would help.

The secretary's comments should come as no surprise to anyone who knows his background or has followed his career in the Senate, Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers said.

"He has been a big booster of renewable energy in his home state," Rodgers said, adding that since his

appointment as Interior secretary, Salazar has repeatedly urged the country to move forward with such projects.

A spokeswoman for Salazar wrote in an e-mail to the Times that her boss was carefully reviewing the Cape Wind project but that no decision had been reached.

Mark Forest, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, D-Mass., said his office had contacted Salazar's office for some clarification about his comments on Cape Wind but had not heard anything as of yesterday.

An informal comment period on the MMS report expires March 21. So far MMS officials have received 360 comments on the final report, including some from other federal agencies that are critical of its contents. Those comments will be posted on the agency's Web site within two weeks of the close of the comment period, MMS spokesman Nicholas Pardi said.

The review of the project's impact on historic and Indian tribal properties is still under way, and Federal Aviation Administration officials continue to study whether the project would be a hazard for air traffic.

The MMS review of Cape Wind is also the subject of an investigation by the Inspector General of the Interior Department, Earl Devaney, who Obama recently named to watch over the money spent in the economic recovery package.

Massachusetts officials have signed off on several important approvals for the project. A procedural denial of Cape Wind by the Cape Cod Commission is currently under review by the state's Energy Facilities Siting Board. The siting board will hold a hearing tomorrow in Boston on a request by Cape Wind to overturn the commission decision and wrap up approvals for a handful of other state and local permits for the project.