

Wind Farm update

By Richard Elrick

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Now, with the conclusion of the four public comment hearings held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACoE) for the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding the proposed Horseshoe Shoal Wind Farm project, the time for some assessment and re-assessment is at hand.

After almost three years of study and analysis, the DEIS was finally issued. Most observers have



described the DEIS as an extremely extensive and comprehensive review document. It addressed the overwhelming number of issues raised by the opponents over these many months. While the recent comments at the hearings may give rise to a few more areas to be re-considered, it's clear that a huge

majority of the DEIS demonstrated that the benefits of the wind farm substantially outweigh any detriments that might result.

One of the unifying aspects of the wind farm debate has been that even the opponents haven't denied the need for additional renewable energy. Instead, they simply propose hurdles and "policies" that would make its development less likely. Everyone acknowledges the great responsibility we have to reduce our reliance on dirty and unreliable Middle East oil. The country's health, economy, national security, and long-term sustainability of our way of life demand that we pursue as aggressive a policy as possible to promote the development of renewables of all kinds, wherever they are feasible and make economic sense.

Much to the wind farm's opponents' disappointment, I'm sure, was how overwhelmingly supportive the Statement was for the project. In section after section, the Statement's findings document how, with minimal harmful effects other than being visible from some of the Cape's beaches, the building of the wind farm would significantly improve air quality and help the economy with jobs, tourism and investment. It would decrease our dangerous reliance on the volatile fossil fuels market, while allowing us to do our part to stem the tide of global warming. No, the building of one 130-turbine project won't stop global warming; it won't eliminate our air pollution, and it won't end our region's reliance on oil from Saudi Arabia and Iraq. But it absolutely will help to reduce these harms, and it most assuredly is the necessary first big step to start the process of energy independence for America.

Now, with the full realization that all their "substantive" arguments, other than visual impact, were laid waste by the Statement's findings, the opponents have been left with only the process for permitting the wind farm and the messenger responsible for that process and its results to criticize. This, of course, is not uncommon. When you're not having any success attacking the message, you attack the messenger. First, the opponents questioned the objectivity of the DEIS studies and said they couldn't be trusted because Cape Wind (the wind farm's builder) had been required by the ACoE to pay for them - just like all the other projects under the Corps' jurisdiction. Not unexpectedly, the opponents fail to inform the public that the Corps directed the consultants, and always maintained control over the development of the work product of those studies.

The other anti-wind farm argument we hear many of our politicians reciting these days is that there should be a complete moratorium on all offshore wind turbines until a new comprehensive Ocean Policy can be legislated by Congress. Again, we can all agree, as the US Commission on Ocean Policy recommended, that there should be a comprehensive policy on the development of off shore wind turbines. But just as the Commission's Chairman Thomas Kitsos also said, the development of such a policy should not in any way stop the current Cape Wind Horseshoe Shoal project from continuing along the review process. The truth is, however, for many of the opponents I've spoken with, no matter what the country's policy for wind farm development might be in the future, they would never support the building of a single wind turbine in Nantucket Sound.

In fact, Congress has had decades to develop an energy and ocean policy, but failed miserably. Presently, there appears no likelihood that a consensus on a new policy will be forthcoming. That means that any new and immensely necessary electricity produced by off shore wind turbines won't be available for possibly many more decades - particularly if people are allowed to exclude these projects from their "backyards" just because they think they're ugly. That is unacceptable and irresponsible.

Yes, Nantucket Sound is a beautiful and wonderful place to have for our back yard. But it is not pristine, and it is not in any way similar to that one-of-a-kind national park, the Grand Canyon, as some of the wind farm opponents have alleged. As a 20-year ferryboat captain I can attest to the fact that

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Nantucket Sound is and has always been an essentially commercial body of water. Even to this day fishing boats drag its bottom, fuel tankers transit it, while some ferries are still allowed by law to discharge human waste into it. Considering all the likely benefits that would accrue, the building of a non-polluting, electricity-generating wind farm on a small portion of the Sound would hardly seem inconsistent with such present uses.

In the spirit of the Christmas season, with its focus on hope, rebirth and regeneration, let us

hope that our elected officials will exercise the leadership we expect from them to re-think their initial politically motivated, knee-jerk opposition to the wind farm. Let us further hope that rather than simply saying they support renewable energy, they and the other opponents will actually do something to promote it, rather than to continue the exaggeration, misinformation and fear that have characterized their comments from the beginning of this debate.

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