

MMS seeks input on offshore energy uses

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The federal agency in charge of reviewing a proposed wind farm on Nantucket Sound is soliciting feedback as it works to establish long-term regulations for offshore alternative energy.

The Minerals Management Service (MMS), a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior, will accept comments until Feb. 28 as it seeks to implement a regulatory program for alternative energy use along the outer continental shelf. The agency is responsible for developing such a plan by mid-year.

According to its stated policy, the MMS will continue to review Cape Wind Associates' specific plan to construct 130 wind turbines on Nantucket Sound even as it fashions general guidelines for the entire industry. Whatever guidelines are eventually put in place, including regulations concerning leases and revenue sharing, will affect the local proposal.

"It's going to effect Cape Cod in that, whatever guidelines are established, they will apply," said Gary Strasburg, a

spokesman for MMS. "It would still be important to comment and we'd be interested in anything that people had to say."

According to a prepared statement, MMS's goal in creating the regulatory program is "to provide access to the OCS in a way that balances competing and complementary uses of offshore acreage; ensures consultation with affected states and local governments; takes into account the evolving nature of the energy industry, and provides fair return to the United States for access to the OCS."

Comments can be made via the MMS Web site and its online commenting system. Specifically, the department seeks comments on the following five areas: access to OCS lands and resources; environmental information, management and compliance; operational activities; payments and revenues; and coordination and consultation.

MMS manages offshore oil and gas exploration as well as renewable and alternative energy sources such as wind, wave and solar on 1.76 billion acres of the outer continental shelf.