

White House opposes move to scrap Cape Wind

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In the Bush administration's most significant statement to date on the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm, a top energy official is urging Congress to strike controversial legislation that could doom the project.

Department of Energy undersecretary David K. Garman, in a May 4 letter to key lawmakers, called a proposal that would specifically grant the Massachusetts governor veto authority over the plan "unwise for several reasons."

Targeting Cape Wind Associates' proposed wind farm, Garman wrote, would miss an opportunity to provide clean energy to a region struggling to meet growing energy demand.

"More broadly," Garman wrote, "singling out wind generation in this manner could have a chilling impact on the continued investment and growth of this promising renewable energy source."

The administration letter, sent three months after President Bush first called wind energy one solution to the nation's "addiction" to foreign oil, further propels the contentious Nantucket Sound proposal into the national debate over energy. In the next few weeks, federal lawmakers are expected to consider a provision tucked into an \$8.7 billion Coast Guard bill that would specifically grant the Bay State governor authority to veto wind projects on Nantucket Sound - including the 130-turbine Cape Wind plan that would be the nation's first offshore wind farm.

The White House recommendation may boost efforts already under way by a growing list of House and Senate leaders who object to the anti-Cape Wind legislation.

"The Bush administration is now lending its voice to the chorus who have already expressed outrage over the anti-Cape Wind provision," said Sue Reid, staff attorney for the Conservation Law Foundation.

The Coast Guard bill amendment was written by U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, an Alaska Republican, at the urging of U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, a wind farm opponent and Massachusetts Democrat. A House vote on the amendment expected last week was delayed as opposition to the provision surged - and Kennedy, a Hyannisport resident, emerged as the prime target of

Setting the rules

■ The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service will host a public hearing May 25 in Dedham for comment on its emerging policy on renewable energy projects for the nation's Outer Continental Shelf.

■ The agency was given lead authority over such projects - including the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm - as part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

■ The hearing will begin at 5:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Boston-Dedham Hotel and Conference Center at 55 Ariadne Road in Dedham.

■ A final policy will likely be completed within 18 months.

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much of the criticism.

While many lawmakers have balked at what they call a "back-room" deal to derail the Nantucket Sound proposal, wind farm critics have responded, pointing to what they call Cape Wind's own "sweetheart deal." They argue a provision in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 was tailored to benefit Cape Wind. In particular, the energy act exempts the Nantucket Sound developer from competitive bidding for its site, a luxury future developers won't enjoy.

"It's no surprise that (the Bush) administration would support no-bid contracts," Melissa Wagoner, a Kennedy spokeswoman, said yesterday in response to the energy department letter.

The Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, the local group trying to kill the project, called the energy department's position on the Stevens amendment contradictory since the Department of Interior is still crafting a policy for offshore renewable energy projects.

Interior's Minerals Management Service - the federal agency with lead oversight of the Cape Wind proposal - released a schedule yesterday for public hearings on the regulatory process.

"Cape Wind has some powerful allies who have a national agenda, but no local stake," said Audra Parker, assistant executive director of the Alliance.

"While MMS calls for a programmatic review, the Department of Energy is saying 'move forward,' even though there's not a program in place."

Cape Wind officials deny their proposal received any preferential treatment. Besides, the energy bill was open to debate on the Senate floor for two weeks without Kennedy weighing in on the provision, said Mark Rodgers, Cape Wind spokesman.

"Given their track record, I have every reason to believe that they keep close tabs on the legislation regarding the Cape Wind proposal," Rodgers said.

The building momentum against the Stevens amendment, Rodgers said, has the developer "cautiously optimistic" the language will be stripped from the Coast Guard bill and the review process will continue.

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