

Cape Cod Wind Farm Project May Be Headed for Pasture Massachusetts' governor is likely to get veto rights over a plan Sen. Edward Kennedy opposes also.

By Elizabeth Mehren, Times Staff Writer
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BOSTON — One side says a 130-turbine wind farm in Nantucket Sound will provide a fine source of renewable energy. The other says the 24-square-mile development will despoil one of the country's most majestic expanses of open water.

The debate over the proposed Cape Wind project has simmered in this state for almost five years. But as concern about skyrocketing energy prices mounts, the fight has taken a sharp turn, thanks to a deal blessed by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

Kennedy is a Cape Cod property owner and a longtime foe of the project. With the senator's approval, a provision that would allow the governor of a state adjacent to the Nantucket Sound site to quash the development was attached to a routine Coast Guard funding bill. Massachusetts is the only state that abuts the proposed site, which sits in federal waters, and Gov. Mitt Romney also opposes the bill. The House and Senate are expected to consider the measure later this month.

Cape Wind supporters are outraged, claiming that in a textbook display of Washington horse-trading, the veto authority was quietly tacked on to an unrelated bill that was sure to pass.

"This is a project of monumental importance to New England and the United States in weaning ourselves off fossil fuel dependence," said Philip Warburg, president of the Conservation Law Foundation, based in Boston. The nonprofit group has kept careful tabs on the wind farm plan since it was unveiled almost five years ago, he said.

"We are deeply concerned that some very narrow interests are seeking to derail the project at the eleventh hour," Warburg said.

Cape Wind, a private development project, wants to put 130 wind turbines in an area of Nantucket Sound known as Horseshoe Shoal — a spot that was chosen for its wind currents and shallow depth as well as its location in federal waters.

Cape Wind officials say the sandy location also allows the piles supporting the turbines to be installed in what they call "the least environmentally disruptive" fashion. The piles — hollow steel tubes about 15 feet in diameter — are pounded to a depth of about 80 feet. About 35 feet of piling remains above water, and the turbines are attached to these piles. The blades are mounted atop the turbines.

With blades attached, each turbine would stand 426 feet tall, the height of a medium-sized skyscraper. The proposed stretch of the project is about the size of Manhattan.

The \$800-million effort would provide up to 75% of the power for Cape Cod and the nearby islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, according to Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers. Rodgers said Cape Wind has invested more than \$23 million in a process that has involved 17 state and federal agencies.

Kennedy, an avid sailor whose family compound in Hyannis Port stands about eight miles from the proposed development, has opposed the project since its inception. In an op-ed column in Sunday's Cape Cod Times, the state's senior Democratic senator said he believed in the future of wind energy, and supported a "comprehensive national policy" for offshore wind projects.

But Kennedy said ecological concerns make Horseshoe Shoal the wrong place for a large-scale

development that would remain in place permanently even if the facility failed to deliver its promised energy supply. He also expressed concern about possible risk to the region's fishing industry, as well as tourism on Cape Cod and Nantucket.

Evidently Kennedy is not alone in that opinion. In a nonbinding referendum last month, 66% of Nantucket residents said they opposed the wind farm.

In a deal first reported in the Boston Globe, the senator offered no objection when Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) offered to add the gubernatorial veto to the Coast Guard funding bill.

"Sen. Stevens asked him for his take on it, and he was happy to give him his thoughts," said Kennedy's press secretary, Melissa Wagoner. "He actually didn't even see the language until after it was filed."

Calling the veto maneuver a "last-minute, back-door deal," spokesman Steve Smith of Greenpeace USA said his organization was endorsing a resolution that would strip the veto rider from the Coast Guard bill.

"We're really thinking about the big-picture implications," Smith said. "This is our big chance to take concrete action on renewable energy, and we're going to kill it because it's going to ruin Ted Kennedy's view? This is the clean energy future that folks like us have been advocating for a while, and we would hate to see it go away."

Christine Real de Azua, assistant director of communications for the American Wind Energy Assn., a lobbying organization for wind development, agreed: "We see it as a blow if Cape Wind goes down. It would be a blow both to sensible energy policy and to good government."

But Ernie Corrigan, a spokesman for the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, said the move to bring the project under state control was long overdue. The wind farm's proposed site sits in federal water surrounded by state-controlled water — one of only two places in the country with such a configuration.

"Our view has always been that the state of Massachusetts ought to have a direct say on a project that is going to impact the state," he said. "It's in federal water, but I don't think anybody who lives on Cape Cod or the islands thinks of themselves as a federal resident."

With similar projects in Scandinavia and Britain, he said, many supporters have been lulled into thinking of wind farms as an energy panacea.

"Cape Wind has done a very good job of selling this thing as almost bucolic, and it is anything but bucolic," Corrigan said. "It is an industrial project that would assemble the largest concentration of offshore wind turbines in the world. At night, it would literally transform what is now a crystal-clear skyline into something more like an urban skyline, with tall towers and blinking lights."

Romney, a Republican who has said he will not seek reelection but who is expected to pursue his party's presidential nomination, has stated repeatedly that he does not want wind turbines in Nantucket Sound.

"I want more wind power in the commonwealth. I'd like to see it on other places in our coast and in our land," he said late last month at the statehouse. "But I think in this particular area, surrounded by state waters and as a tourism treasure for the commonwealth and the nation, this is the wrong place for a wind farm."

The leading Republican and Democratic candidates to succeed Romney also oppose the project.

Rodgers, of Cape Wind, said the possible veto was "a major setback not only to the project, but

to the future potential of the offshore wind industry."

"This is the flagship project. And if in the late innings of the game, the rules are dramatically changed — if the rug is pulled out from the regulatory process at such a late stage — I think that would have a very chilling effect," he said. "The broader impact would go far beyond our project, shaking to the core any kind of business confidence in this emerging industry."

Rodgers said the project's visual impact is "a legitimate issue — it really is, and it is one of many that should be part of the Cape Wind debate. But it is not the only issue. It is one of many."

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