

Firm proposes 120 floating turbines

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HYANNIS — Massachusetts — both on shore and off — is a prime location for alternative energy development, according to a Dutch-owned company that hopes to develop a deep-water wind farm off Martha's Vineyard within the next few years.

Blue H USA LLC, a subsidiary of Blue H Technologies, announced yesterday that it has asked to lease an area 23 miles south of Martha's Vineyard and 45 miles from New Bedford for the first floating, deep-water wind turbine off the U.S. coast.

The lease request has been filed with U.S. Minerals Management Service, the same federal agency reviewing Cape Wind's proposal to build a 130-turbine wind farm in 24-square-mile area of Nantucket Sound.

It is no coincidence that Blue H chose yesterday — the same day MMS was holding the first of four public hearings on a draft environmental report on the Cape Wind — to make its announcement.

The company wants to draw attention to their proposal, company officials said during an interview at the Cape Cod Times, hastening to add that they are not in competition with Cape Wind.

"Because Cape Cod is at the center of our state and national debate about wind power, this is an appropriate place and time to make the announcement," Blue H spokesman Martin Reilly said.

If all goes according to company plans, Blue H could have a demonstration turbine in the water by the summer of 2009, according to Raymond Dackerman, Blue H general manager. The company launched a similar test turbine off the coast of Italy in December.

But, changes in U.S. regulations will need to occur before a deep-water test turbine can be erected, an agency spokeswoman said yesterday afternoon. There is currently a prohibition against testing new turbine technology, said Maureen Bornholdt, program manager for MMS's Alternative Energy and Alternate Use Program.

However, Blue H could put up a meteorological data tower, she said,

Offshore winds and the proximity of University of Massachusetts in Amherst and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston — both innovators in alternative energy research — make Massachusetts a prime area for this kind of development, Dackerman said.

Ultimately the company would like to erect 120 turbines, with cables running to New Bedford. Turbines would operate from floating platforms, anchored to the seabed. The platforms are adapted for North Atlantic sea conditions and similar to floating platforms used in off-shore oil production.

The project would cover approximately 40 square miles. In a best-case scenario — including environmental impact studies, public hearings and federal approval — the company could begin installing turbines by 2013, according to Dackerman. Turbines would be built on shore and towed to the site where they would be anchored in federal waters 161-feet-deep, he said.

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