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Massachusetts zones for off-shore energy, Vineyard to fight
by Read Kingsbury

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09/26/09 - Wind turbines less than a mile from shore, tidal power generators off Martha's Vineyard, deepwater aquaculture, commercial wind farms behind the Elizabeth Islands and in the middle of Cape Cod Bay — these uses are all allowed in the state's draft Ocean Management Plan, the Nantucket Independent reported.

The plan is in public hearings; a final version is expected by Dec. 31.

The plan divides the coastal waters into three zones; all development prohibited (off Cape Cod National Seashore), suitable for 166 wind turbines (off the tip of the Elizabeth Islands and Nomans Land behind the Vineyard) and multi-use, 85 percent of the state waters.

Community-scale wind projects, 10 turbines or less, would be welcome in the multi-use waters. The plan also includes provisional locations for tidal power, between the Elizabeth Islands and Martha's Vineyard and in the channel between Nantucket and the Vineyard.

Meanwhile, in an extraordinary display of unity, the Vineyard's six towns, the Dukes County Commission and Martha's Vineyard Commission oppose state plans to permit huge commercial wind-farming operations within three miles of the island, according to the Vineyard Gazette.

Without waiting for the final draft of the state plan, the island governments plan to establish a moratorium on all large-scale wind power developments on the island and in surrounding waters. Their method would be to establish a District of Critical Planning Concern (DCPC) that would apply to almost the entire Island, as well as surrounding waters up to three miles offshore.

Maine to test deepwater technology

The waters to the west, south and east of Isle au Haut are one of seven offshore areas being considered by the Maine Ocean Energy Task Force as an offshore wind demonstration area. Approximately 75 people from Isle au Haut, Stonington and Deer Isle gathered in Ellsworth to hear about the plan, according to Island Ad-Vantages.

The purpose of the demonstration projects is primarily to test new deepwater floating wind-turbine technologies, state officials said. Only areas within the state's three-mile jurisdiction were considered. Other criteria included a water depth of at least 200 feet, and average annual wind speeds greater than 17 miles per hour.

The director of the University of Maine's Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Center observed that 8.3 percent of the total offshore wind energy in the U.S. is available in the Gulf of Maine. He described a 20-year goal of harnessing 3 percent of that wind energy, or five gigawatts, the equivalent of five nuclear power plants. He said that the research to be done at these testing sites was a necessary step and would bring substantial economic benefit to the area.

During the discussion fisherman expressed concern that the project would affect their livelihoods.

Tidal energy project gets funds

The Department of Energy approved \$599,547 in funding for the proposed Nantucket-Edgartown tidal energy project being coordinated by the University of Massachusetts Marine Renewable Energy Center, the Inquirer and Mirror reported. The money is for study on the impact of the proposed 1.5MW tidal-energy project on protected species and the marine environment between Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.

Floating wind project seeks permit

Blue H USA, a Dutch-owned company that wants to anchor floating wind turbines some 20 miles southwest of Martha's Vineyard, has applied for a permit from the U.S. Army Corps, the Martha's Vineyard Times reported.

The company wants to anchor a demonstration unit on the outer continental shelf approximately 23 miles off Chilmark and about 32 miles southeast of Block Island, according to the Army Corps. Last March the company unveiled a proposal to build a floating 120-turbine offshore wind farm in 167 feet of water, the first floating deepwater wind farm of its kind in the United States. The company said it would be capable of generating 429 megawatts of power.

According to the Army Corps, the demonstration unit will consist of a platform held 66 feet under water by a weight on the sea floor. A tower carrying data collection equipment will be mounted on the platform and will stand approximately 197 feet above the surface.