

Wind firm touts deepwater alternative

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By **Patrick Cassidy**

STAFF WRITER

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HYANNIS — In what one Cape Wind official called an "eyebrow-raising" development, plans for a deep-water wind farm off the coast of Massachusetts will be unveiled only hours before the start of a public hearing Monday on Cape Wind's proposal to build 130 turbines in Nantucket Sound.

Blue H USA LLC will announce plans for a floating deep-water wind energy project 23 miles off the coast of Martha's Vineyard and 45 miles from New Bedford, according to a representative for the company.

Details about the project will not be available until a press conference scheduled for 2:30 p.m. Monday at the John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum on Main Street, Blue H spokesman Martin Reilly said.

Blue H's international parent company launched its first offshore floating wind turbine off the southern coast of Italy in December.

Reilly also represents Hy-Line Cruises, one of two ferry companies that operate extensively in Nantucket Sound. Both boat lines have come out against Cape Wind's proposal.

Hy-Line vice president David Scudder has previously said that building wind turbines in the middle of the Sound is a "recipe for disaster."

The first of four public hearings on a draft environmental report on the Cape Wind project by the U.S. Minerals Management Service starts at 6 p.m. Monday. Three more hearings follow Tuesday through Thursday on the Islands and in Boston.

Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers said Blue H has a long way to go before it receives any permits or can lease a location for its proposal.

The Minerals Management Service, the federal agency reviewing Cape Wind, released an interim policy for offshore alternative energy projects last year but permitting and leasing regulations for future projects are not expected to be announced until later this year.

"All they're able to apply for right now is a data tower like the one we have," Rodgers said, referring to Cape Wind's meteorological tower on Horseshoe Shoal.

He noted that the site in the Sound made the most economic sense and posed the least environmental costs when MMS compared it to other locations.

The most vocal opponents of Cape Wind's project said yesterday that, in general, the prospect of a floating wind farm was promising though they wanted more details on the Blue H proposal.

"We've been talking about alternatives all along," said Audra Parker, spokeswoman for the anti-Cape Wind group the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound.

"Assuming that the environmental impacts are assessed, it could pose fewer conflicts."

Glenn Wattley, Alliance chief executive officer and president, said he has had his eye on Blue H for some time. "We need to look at it more, but it does sound promising," he said.

If the impact on the environment is acceptable, the floating turbines would likely cost less than the Cape Wind proposal because less steel would be required to construct the windmills, Wattley said.

And he said the Minerals Management Service should have taken into account more alternative sites such as the Blue H location.

"They didn't do that because they didn't think these technologies were viable," Wattley said.

The Alliance has long contended the Sound is not the right place for a wind farm and a deep water site would provide more wind resources.

Eventually, wind projects will be further out from shorelines and deepwater technologies will be used, Rodgers said.

But for now, proven technologies such as Cape Wind's must be used to increase renewable energy production in the region, he said.

"We would not see that as a competitive project or a competitive technology," Rodgers said of the floating wind farm proposal. "In the long run, we're going to need a lot of renewable energy."

Patrick Cassidy can be reached at pcassidy@capecodonline.com.

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