

Win-win for wind

The technology exists to build wind farms in deeper waters, so why spoil Nantucket Sound?

May 25, 2008 6:00 AM

When the Cape Wind project received relatively favorable reviews from the federal government in its draft assessment of the project, the Times noted that the developer was now in the "red zone," the last 20 yards before scoring a touchdown — building 130 massive turbines in Nantucket Sound.

If that is the case, then another wind farm developer has introduced a game-changing event.

Blue H USA LLC, a subsidiary of a Dutch firm, has proposed building 120 wind turbines about 23 miles off Martha's Vineyard on floating platforms. The massive offshore wind farm, capable of producing more electricity than the Cape Wind project, would be invisible from the shore and far from shipping channels and ferry routes, migratory bird pathways and popular fishing grounds.

"It maximizes the benefits of offshore wind energy and minimizes the negatives," said Ray Dackerman, general manager of Blue H USA. "It's a win-win situation."

As a result, Blue H has asked the Minerals Management Service, the same federal agency reviewing the Cape Wind project, to lease a 40-square-mile area about 45 miles from New Bedford.

Of course, the federal government must first develop an ocean management plan that identifies appropriate and inappropriate areas to build commercial projects. The Minerals Management Service was authorized to establish an offshore alternative energy program as part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The agency expects to announce permanent rules for leasing offshore areas for commercial-scale alternative energy projects by the end of the year.

If approved, Blue H could have a demonstration turbine in the water by the summer of 2009. In a best-case scenario, including environmental impact studies, public hearings and federal approval, the company could begin installing turbines by 2013.

Considering that litany of objections to Cape Wind, it's possible that Blue H will be up and running while Cape Wind is still in court facing legal challenges.

Former state Sen. Martin Reilly, who is working with Blue H, said the company's turbines would be built somewhere along the South Coast, which would give a needed boost to the region's economy. Fall River and New Bedford already host the manufacturing locations for the 8,000 parts each turbine requires.

Now that the technology exists to build wind farms in deep waters, why would the federal government approve Cape Wind with all its negatives?

Returning to the football analogy, why would New England settle for a risky field goal, facing huge obstacles assembled on the 20-yard line, when it could score a game-winning touchdown from inside the 1 on first down?