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## OUR VIEW: Powerful winds, 05-11-08

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### The Herald News

Posted May 11, 2008 @ 12:00 AM

Wind energy opponents often rattle off a litany of objections: Windmills aren't aesthetically pleasing (a notion many dispute); they pose a danger to migrating birds; they're noisy; they're inefficient and expensive. But a new proposal for a deep-water, off-shore wind farm answers all the skeptics' objections and, in addition to its environmental benefits, could be an economic boon to Fall River.

Blue H USA LLC has recently installed the world's first deep-water windmill off the coast of Italy and now wants to bring that technology to the SouthCoast, which has been referred to as the Saudi Arabia of wind energy because of

our dependable North Atlantic winds. Rather than fight critics, Blue H has embraced their concerns and worked to satisfy them, maximizing the positives of the technology while minimizing the perceived negatives.

The solution? Locate the turbines out to sea on floating — but stabilized — platforms similar to oil rigs, far away from any people or animals. The New England farm would be situated 48 miles off the coast of New Bedford, 32 miles off of Block Island. It would be invisible from the shore. It does not interfere with any shipping channels, flight paths or popular recreational boating areas. Noise issues are obviously mitigated, and the impact on wildlife is minimal in a location without a high concentration of life. In fact, counterweights that will be sunk to stabilize the platforms will act as artificial reefs, actually benefiting marine life.

It turns out answering the critics is actually a benefit to the technology, as 90 percent of the potential energy from wind is well offshore in deep water. A wind farm similar to the one Blue H is proposing could add 420 mega-watts of energy to the power grid, enough to power about 120,000 homes, according to Blue H USA General manager Raymond Dackerman. And those numbers could go even higher when the grid is capable of accepting more, he said.

The wind turbines would be built onshore and floated out to their locations, which further mitigates the environmental impact of building at sea — which is the common practice with shallow-water wind farms — and presents Fall River with a potentially huge economic development opportunity. Former state Sen. Martin Reilly, who is working with Blue H, is touting Fall River and New Bedford as manufacturing locations for the 8,000 parts each turbine requires. The region already has the manufacturing facilities in place, has a ready workforce with manufacturing know-how and has the added benefit of proximity to the University of Massachusetts, which has been a national leader in wind energy research and development. The location is perfect, and Reilly, who has been introducing Dackerman to local politicians — including Mayor Robert Correia — has sold Blue H on the SouthCoast.

"Assembly has to happen locally. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it," Dackerman said. "We have a chance to make a difference in employment. And we're not going to stop once we get started. This is an opportunity for the SouthCoast to get in at the ground floor."

Reilly and Dackerman believe approval for the project from the federal Department of the Interior is imminent. Should they be approved, this would be only the beginning for an industry that is likely to see immense growth. Renewable energy like wind power is the future as the world begins to turn away from dangerous fossil fuels like oil, coal and natural gas.

Fall River would be wise to partner with Blue H and welcome the company in, so it may take advantage not only of the environmental benefits of wind energy, but the economic potential as well.

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