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Deep-water turbines get Mass. congressional support

BY PETER B. BRACE INDEPENDENT WRITER

Deep-water wind energy firm Blue H USA is hopeful that it can begin construction of its demonstration floating wind turbine on Oct. 1 and install it 23 miles south of Martha's Vineyard in the middle of next year.

Buoyed by a letter of unanimous support for its proposed wind farm of 120 turbines to generate 420 megawatts that was sent by all 10 members of the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation to the Minerals Management Service of the Federal Department of the Interior in early July, Blue H is confident that it can have its data collection turbine online by the summer of 2009.

That letter reads in part, "...we therefore encourage you to review and consider the application submitted by Blue H USA, which could prove beneficial for developing future renewable energy resources for Massachusetts and the nation."

Understandably, Blue H is excited and invigorated by this bipartisan letter of support for its deep-water wind farm project.

"It's really unprecedented to get a letter of support from 10 congressmen and senators," said Blue H spokesman Marty Reilly. "I think with their

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leadership and their letter to the MMS, we're confident that we're going to get the permit from the MMS. So we expect our permit from MMS in about two months from now, which would allow us to begin construction of our demonstration project this fall."

In March, Blue H submitted a Nomination For Lease with the MMS to install a demonstration wind turbine preceding what it is hoping will be the first floating deepwater wind energy farm anchored at a depth of 167 feet in U.S. waters. Blue H USA principal Ray Dackerman said that wind speeds over their chosen ocean area 23 miles south of Martha's Vineyard are outstanding to superb, blowing at 21 mph and higher, and that water depths are within the Blue H target depth of 164 to 384 feet. From the water, the turbines would be 196.8 feet to the top of the generator and 328 feet water to tip of the blade.

The design of Blue H's floating turbines evolved from floating oil rigs located well offshore in which a steel, air-tight base large enough, strong enough and seaworthy enough to hold an oil rig platform is partially submerged and anchored with steel chains to massive concrete blocks on the ocean floor. This submerged deepwater platform is held steady by the uplifting force of the buoyant base pulling against the steel chains attached to concrete blocks, holding the turbines in place through what Blue H terms all foreseeable weather conditions.

That Blue H is proposing a wind farm far out to sea, compared with Cape Wind Associates near-shore, shallow water installation plan for 130 wind turbines on Horseshoe Shoal in a 24- square-mile area in Nantucket Sound, is not lost on concerned citizens of the region including the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, a cautious supporter and ardent opponent of Cape Wind's proposal. In contrast, Blue H's wind farm would be out of public view, fishing grounds and not as constrained by the presence of marine mammals and birds using this part of the ocean.

"At our location, we ultimately have the potential to generate four to five times the amount of power because we aren't constrained by ferry routes, shipping lanes, commercial and recreational boaters or air traffic," said Reilly. "If the grid can accept the power, we could tie into the state of Rhode Island, Connecticut and conceivably New

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York, making Blue H a substantial generator of clean, green, cost-effective renewable power for New England and the nation."

But before the blades start turning, Blue H needs a host of permits including the go-ahead from the Minerals Management Service. Like Cape Wind, Blue H must file an environmental impact report for MMS to review. MMS in turn, would then kick out a draft environmental impact statement and a public comment period would follow. On the basis of public testimony and all other comments from local, state and federal agencies, the MMS would then issue a final environmental impact statement containing either a denial or issuance of a permit. I