

## State draws zones for coast wind farms

### Aims to protect sensitive areas of sea

July 01, 2009

Dozens of wind turbines could sprout within sight of the Massachusetts shoreline under a first-of-its-kind state blueprint with the promise of generating both electricity and controversy.

The draft plan, scheduled to be released today, would allow a series of small wind farms of up to 10 turbines each in coastal waters that stretch 3 miles from shore. Substantially larger farms - similar to what's proposed in Nantucket Sound - could be built off Cape Cod near Cuttyhunk Island and adjacent to another tiny island several miles off Martha's Vineyard.

But much like zoning laws on land that attempt to protect sensitive areas, the state plan aims to spare precious pieces of the sea that include fish nurseries and endangered whale feeding zones. Before developers could start aquaculture farms, lay electric cables, or plant wind turbines in those areas, they would have to prove there is no better alternative.

"For more than 300 years the Commonwealth has had a unique relationship with the ocean," said Ian Bowles, state secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs. "Today, we are taking that relationship a step further by determining [its] future based on science but also recognizing the imperative of developing renewable energy . . . in an environmentally appropriate fashion."

The plan would have no effect on the 130 turbines proposed in Nantucket Sound because they would sit in federal waters.

But much like the Nantucket project and even single turbines on land, the smaller wind farms appear destined to pit the desire to generate clean energy against concerns that the whirling machines would obstruct views and harm wildlife.

Several offshore wind farms are likely to be proposed by companies and communities that support renewable power, but it's unclear how many will ultimately be built. At least one community, Hull, had previously expressed interest in hosting up to four turbines a mile offshore.

The blueprint gives the state's six coastal regional planning authorities the option to build up to 10 wind turbines each in state waters at least one-third of a mile from shore, for a total of 60 statewide. While the plan gives refusal rights to the community in whose waters a wind farm is proposed, it does not give similar rights to adjacent communities.

"We could have no say," said Frank Haggerty, who successfully fought against a turbine on land near his home in Mattapoisett. "Turbines have their place, but where I've seen them they are 7 miles out - not a mile."

The plan emerges as the nation's waters become increasingly crowded from competing uses of ship traffic, fishing, and a flurry of offshore energy projects, from liquefied natural gas ports to wind farms. Two weeks ago, President Obama called such ocean management a priority to help manage federal waters that stretch 3 to 200 miles out to sea.

Environmentalists and policy makers largely praised Massachusetts' plan yesterday, but some said it's not enough to simply try to avoid sensitive areas. Some, they said, should be completely off-limits.

The plan only prohibits development in the Cape Cod Ocean Sanctuary, which is adjacent to the Cape Cod National Seashore.

"All eyes are on Massachusetts to lead the nation in ocean planning," said Sally Yozell, director of East Coast marine conservation for The Nature Conservancy, an advocacy group. "It's a great energy plan for the next century, but when it comes to an ocean plan it falls back to the previous century."

While other states, such as California, have used zoning rules to balance conservation with fishing off their coast, Massachusetts is the first to insert renewable energy into the mix. It has tried to zone the state's seas at least three times over the last two decades, but efforts repeatedly collapsed amid competing interests or because there was no compelling need at that moment.

That has changed. In the last several years, several wind turbine parks have been proposed in state waters - including a project of up to 120 turbines in Buzzards Bay - along with some wave and tidal energy projects.

At the same time, more pipes and electrical cables are crisscrossing the state's seabed while hundreds of boats, barges, and tankers ply the waters above it. The state is also seeing an increase in requests to mine sand offshore to armor beaches as well as requests to start aquaculture farms. In nearby federal waters, the proposed Cape Wind farm has been a lightning rod for controversy - and for calls to better manage ocean uses.

As a result, Governor Deval Patrick signed the state's Oceans Act in May 2008, requiring environmental officials to come up with an ocean management plan by the end of this month. The plan must become final by Dec. 31. Five public hearings will be held on the plan, probably in early September, and public comment will end in November.

The proposed Buzzards Bay project would probably be killed if the draft plan is made final because it is too big. Its developer, Jay Cashman, said yesterday he needed to see the ocean plan before commenting.

The document gives renewable energy developers a clear signal that large wind farms could one day be built right off Cuttyhunk Island and Nomans Land, an uninhabited island about 3 miles southwest of Martha's Vineyard that was used as a military practice bombing range.

While the two areas comprise only 2 percent of the entire state ocean zoning area, they could support 166 wind turbines to power up to 200,000 homes. And those areas are adjacent to federal waters farther out to sea rich with strong winds.

Patrick Paquette, head of government affairs of the Massachusetts Striped Bass Association, said yesterday he had no problem with a wind farm being built off Cuttyhunk, or on or near a historic reef famous for fishing called Sow & Pigs - as long as fishermen weren't excluded from the area.

Jono Billings, who runs Cuttyhunk Ferry Co., said he can't speak for islanders, but he would like to see wind turbines off the island. "Their look is interesting," said Billings, who hauls lumber, mail, and tourists to the island. "But I'd say the island should get something for it - like free electricity."