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## Wind Advisory

*Wind power is a splendid idea-but only in the right place*

**By Ted Williams**

Fly Rod & Reel, January/February 2006

**There is little debate that the United States** must overcome its addiction to finite, polluting, globe-warming fossil fuels. So here's a proposal for a cheap, renewable, non-polluting alternative energy source: Construct four hydro dams on the lower Snake River.

That proposal, eagerly embraced and implemented by Congress, is about 50 years old, but I cite it to make the point that all energy production has environmental costs. In this case the cost was the extirpation--now nearly complete--of the mightiest salmon and steelhead runs on the planet. The proposal was made by bureaucrats and engineers who either hadn't bothered to answer such questions as "What will happen to the fish?" or answered them incorrectly and in abject ignorance, as in the case of the National Marine Fisheries Service, which proclaimed: "We can work wonders with this [fish] transportation system; we can establish runs of both steelhead trout and salmon in far greater numbers than existed before."

Conservationists have been asking the same question about the giant wind farm planned by Cape Wind Associates for Nantucket Sound off Massachusetts--arguably the most productive marine fish habitat in our nation. Cape Wind and the main permitting agency, the US Army Corps of Engineers, have had five years to provide an answer. So far they haven't.

I don't doubt Mark Rodgers, Cape Wind's director of communications, when he informs me that there aren't that many places where one finds shallow, windy water with relatively small waves and little ship traffic, and that Horseshoe Shoals (the best fishing spot in Nantucket Sound) is an ideal location for one of the world's largest offshore wind farms. On the other hand, neither are there that many (or any) places that surpass Horseshoe Shoals in its abundance of fish, sea birds and marine mammals. In fact, the Sound has been designated as "Essential Fish Habitat" under the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act. What's more, it's protected as an avian migration corridor by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as critical habitat for imperiled birds, mammals and turtles under the Endangered Species Act, and as a marine sanctuary by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts because of its importance as "spawning, nursery and feeding grounds, and migration routes," its "high biological productivity and diversity," and its significance as a "premier marine oriented recreational and historic area."

The federal part of Nantucket Sound (more than three miles from shore) is also an ideal location for a wind farm because there are virtually no federal regulations for such projects. Massachusetts has outlawed industrial development in its waters because of the sound's importance to fish and wildlife.

The project is basically benign, with "minimal" impacts to fish and wildlife, avers the Corps in its 3,800-page draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) released in the fall of 2004. If you question the DEIS hatched by the outfit that brought us the Snake River dams and the flood-proof Mississippi and which has zero experience in US ocean wind farms because there hasn't been one yet, you are a rich, selfish NIMBY who doesn't want his view of the horizon marred by distant metal--at least according to large elements of the press and environmental community. Or, worse, you're a Kennedy. Or, worse still, you're a rich, elitist, gas-squandering boat angler whose aesthetic sensitivities preclude him from pursuing stripers, blues, tuna, mackerel, sea bass, scup, fluke, cod, haddock, false albacore,

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bonito, sharks, etc. within sight of a 24-square-mile industrial park full of tender vessels, fog horns, flashing lights, a transformer substation the size of a 10-story parking garage complete with a helicopter pad and tanks holding 40,000 gallons of transformer oil, and more than one hundred and thirty 247-foot-high power turbines whose 164-foot-long blades reach 417 feet into the sky (100 feet higher than the Statue of Liberty).

"Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a noted environmental attorney, has a new cause: defending Cape Cod property values and yachting from a wind farm project in the waters of Nantucket Sound," sniffs the San Francisco Chronicle. Snottier still is The New York Times, which pontificates as follows: "Soon, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound [the main opposition group] was filing lawsuits, mounting political pressure in Boston and Washington and, to bolster its legal case and maximize public anxiety, generating volumes of doomsaying critiques: The turbines will break up and the oil inside will spill into the sound, in a repeat of the Exxon Valdez disaster. Birds will be torn apart in 'pole-mounted Cuisinarts.' Whales will bump their heads. The annual Figawi race, the Memorial Day weekend Hyannis-to-Nantucket regatta, will have to be canceled. . . . Environmentalists across the country chafe at what they see as the hypocrisy of those supposed Greens on the Cape who oppose the windmills."

The same article quoted the Conservation Law Foundation's Seth Kaplan as saying: "How heavily do you count yachting against the number of people who die from particulate matter? The opponents say they support renewable energy. But it's not acceptable to say that you're in favor of renewable energy only as long as you can't see it."

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), only irrational people find fault with Cape Wind's proposal: "The air quality, public health and global warming benefits of the project are significant and beyond rational dispute," it proclaims. Greenpeace goes so far as to suggest that those who question Cape Wind are fronting for the coal industry.

Wind power in the right place is a splendid idea, just as marine protected areas (MPAs) in the right place are a splendid idea. But some of the big green groups are so impatient, pigheaded, and politically naïve that they are hell-bent to put windfarms anywhere, provided they go in quick. (NRDC, you may recall, is the same organization that, after powwowing about MPAs for less than 24 hours and making virtually no effort at public outreach, proposed to ban all commercial and recreational fishing, including catch-and-release, in "five ocean areas comprising some 19.4 percent of the study area: the nine submarine canyons; the offshore waters near Cape Hatteras, North Carolina; tilefish habitat between Cape May, New Jersey, and Cape Cod, Massachusetts; an 18.9-nautical mile corridor of near-shore waters extending along the study area; and a band along the continental shelf break encompassing the upper slope.")

However, despite the noise from the press and the environmental community, lots of very rational people have lots of very rational questions about the Cape Wind project. Until they start getting some answers they'd be irrational and imprudent not to oppose.

Among entities alleged by the press and Green groups to be "irrational," fronting for Big Coal, and defending "yachting" is the United States Department of the Interior, which complains that "the DEIS is at best incomplete, and too often inaccurate and/or misleading."

Another is the US Environmental Protection Agency, which officially rates the DEIS as "inadequate" and whose regional director remarks: "We do not believe an adequate mitigation or monitoring plan can be developed, nor can a decision be made as to whether the project is environmentally acceptable

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and in the public interest."

The New England Fishery Management Council charges that the DEIS "relies on outdated data for the bulk of the fishery analysis." And that it "suffers from the presentation of incomplete or conflicting data, a reliance on superficial analyses, and the absence of data on private recreational fishing activity and its contribution to the economy. For instance, as presented in the DEIS, the characterization of the recreational fisheries in Nantucket Sound underestimates the amount of effort expended and fails to characterize the financial contribution made to the economies of Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard by these fishermen."

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries notes: "Assertions that mobile finfish and invertebrates will simply move to other parts of the sound with no disruption of their life history during construction of the Cape Wind facility are not supported by the DEIS. Substantial changes may occur in spawning, feeding, and juvenile development of the affected species and these changes may have far-reaching impacts on fisheries in other states as well as impacts on more local species, including birds, that rely upon them for food." And the division charges that "no effort was made by the applicant to obtain comprehensive, representative, site-specific resource or habitat data" and that "the overall level of information provided in the DEIS is inadequate to properly evaluate the potential environmental impacts of this large and precedent-setting project." According to this allegedly "irrational" source, "this project may have substantial, even significant, impacts to fisheries resources, habitat, and harvest activities in Nantucket Sound."

And this warning from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission: "If the project is allowed to go through, the potential for post-construction exclusion of fishermen from the project site is very high for the following reasons: All access could become restricted for security. . . . Most recreational fishermen are not used to handling boats in strong eddies and would be at risk of collision with the bases of the turbines and other boats."

A poll by the University of Massachusetts--commissioned by the Cape and Islands National Public Radio stations and The Cape Cod Times--reveals that residents are about split on the issue. It's clear that the nays, which outnumber the yeas by two percent, don't all own yachts, and it's a major stretch to believe they're all irrational. Moreover, Dr. Clyde Barrow, who headed the polling project, reports no significant differences by party, income or age.

Finally, speaking for himself and not Strippers Forever, which he directs, the eminently rational and sea-savvy Brad Burns told me this: "There'll be no fund to remove all that crap if it turns out to be obsolete. Nobody should feel guilty about wondering about this project. I look at it as I look at dams. These rivers are public property, and certainly the ocean is. And if someone's going to harness this area for private gain, the public has a real right to public scrutiny."

Burns has it right. Although a decommissioning bond will be required, it has never been clear how it will be funded or how much it will be or if it will even be adequate, especially if the project has a shorter-than-expected operating life.

As a boat angler who haunts Nantucket Sound, I'm especially concerned about its fish resources. Yet whenever I have sought solace from Cape Wind and the Corps in the form of cogent answers to my questions, I've gotten only what they hope to harness--wind. For example, I have been told repeatedly by both sources that the turbines, which will be driven into the sea bed of the Sound's best rips, will "improve" my fishing because fish congregate around such structures. I suppose this might be true if I could stomach fishing in an industrial park and if I chased bottom feeders with bait instead

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of fast-moving pelagics with flies. But, like so many assumptions made by Cape Wind and the Corps, the notion that concentrating fish is a good thing has no basis in fact. For example, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission issues this warning: "The potential for turbines and/or associated lighting to increase the prey base of fish-eating birds at the project site needs to be assessed. This increased lighting may lead to unnaturally high concentrations of these species in the area and increase the risk of collision fatalities, particularly among aerial divers. . . . Increased prey could [also] result in abnormally high densities of sea turtles and marine mammals in the project area and may interfere with their migratory movement and behavior patterns by prolonging their stay. Moreover, if turbines enhance fish populations at the project site, it is likely that recreational and commercial fishing effort (and traffic) will increase in the area as well. This may put sea turtles and marine mammals at greater risk of incidental capture in fishing gear and/or getting struck by boats."

When I asked Cape Wind's Mark Rodgers what fishermen's groups support the project, he said: "The International Seafarer's Union. It's a commercial fishing group out of New Bedford." Well, no it isn't. Although a few of its members are commercial fishermen, it's basically a union of workers who profit from ocean development and shipping. The fact is that not one recreational or commercial fishing organization supports the wind farm, and most are stridently opposed.

Cape Wind and its allies are correct in their mantra that acid rain and mercury from coal-fired power plants are killing our fish and rendering them unfit to eat. "Climate change and global warming is going to have a tremendous effect on what kinds of fish you find in various areas," declares Rodgers. "This project starts us down the road to a more sustainable and ecologically friendly way to harness our power and in a way that will coexist very well with the other forms of sea life." That statement needs only one little tweak to be 100 percent correct. The word "this" needs to be replaced by "A properly sited." In fact, so important is wind power to our nation that we can't afford to ruin its reputation by allowing our first offshore project to be an ecological and political disaster just because we got impatient and stuck it in the wrong place.

But where's the right place? I put the question to Chris Herter in early August, when I visited him at his trout camp on Idaho's Warm River. Herter is a passionate and committed angler/conservationist who has spent his adult life walking the walk--first, as the New England regional rep for the National Audubon Society, then as director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine, then as a public affairs agent for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, then as an environmental educator for the National Park Service. Currently, he's president of Linekin Bay Energy Co., a firm that is developing the Northern Maine Wind Energy Station--a windfarm in Maine's potato country that will produce slightly more energy than Cape Wind. The 225 turbines will all be on private land, so there won't be an National Environmental Policy Act review, although the Fish and Wildlife Service will be checking for migratory bird mortality.

"For wildlife reasons we do not want to be on ridge lines like everyone else," said Herter. "All wind projects, no matter where they are, kill birds. The question becomes how many, what kinds, and is the mortality 'acceptable.' One of the ways to determine this is your ability to find dead birds. That's a function of scavenger rates and a function of how diligently you go out and check. In the ocean you have no way of knowing how many birds you're killing." Maine's potato country is not known for its bird migrations. Nantucket Sound, on the other hand, is smack in the middle of one of the East's major migration corridors for all kinds of seabirds, shorebirds, raptors and passerines, including threatened and endangered species. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission warns of the possibility of "significant mortality."

Getting no answers from the Corps or Cape Wind to my questions about wind farm economics, I

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turned to Herter. "We're not intentionally competing with Cape Wind," he said. "However, we happen to believe that doing it on the land makes more sense than in the ocean. For example, there's routine maintenance. A turbine goes down, a blade comes off, how are you going to go out and fix it in the middle of February? Especially in summer, wind off the New England coast is very inactive from dawn until, say 11:30 am. On land there's tax revenue to the town, revenue to the property owner--a whole series of trickle-down economic measures."

And there is speculation that Nantucket Sound's major attraction as a site--apart from it being in an area essentially free of regulation where public water can be monopolized free of charge--is that the location entitles Cape Wind to lavish subsidies. Massachusetts has a system called "the Renewable Portfolio Standard" that creates a market-based system where utilities trade "green credits" and requires utilities to provide an increasing percentage of electricity from renewable sources. From this source Cape Wind will haul in something like \$40 million a year, conceivably for the life of the project. And for the first decade it will get an alternative-energy "production tax credit" from the feds that amounts to \$29 million per year. That's another good reason anglers and even yachters shouldn't feel guilty about questioning the wind farm--they'll be paying for a lot of its operation.

With a few notable exceptions (such as the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which has grave concerns about bird deaths) environmental groups that haven't come out in favor of the Cape Wind project seem singularly unconcerned about threats to Nantucket Sound's fish and wildlife. Having worked closely with these organizations in the past, I know that this is aberrant behavior and can only conclude that they are afraid of getting painted with the elitist-hypocritical-NIMBY brush.

As for enviros promoting the project, they seem committed to America's eat-anything-you-want energy diet. Not a whisper from them about the smartest and cheapest alternative of all--energy conservation. In the best of all possible scenarios Cape Wind will assuage about one percent of New England's energy demand, producing about 170 megawatts. But a study commissioned by the Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships reveals that achievable energy conservation could produce a demand saving of 4,317 megawatts by 2008. According to the study, "cost-effective investments in energy efficiency can more than offset projected electric energy and peak demand growth, deferring the need for 28 combined-power plants of 300-megawatts in output each by 2013."

That's not to say that every little bit of juice dribbled into the New England power grid isn't important. But why is America rushing to pour more energy into such grids before it makes even a token effort to stem the outflow? Before we make an industrial park out of the best fishing area on the East Coast, it might make sense to, for example, flip off baseball-field lights that blaze for hours after the last out, cool it with the neon signs, turn down air-conditioning in office buildings so employees don't have to wear sweaters in summer, unplug the phalanxes of street lights along rural stretches of highway that do nothing but blind you, legislate a few gasoline-efficiency requirements, enact an energy bill that isn't political payola for the coal industry, the utilities and Big Oil--that sort of stuff.