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Expert: N.J. behind as global wind power capacity soars

By Evelyn Lee

Despite the recession, wind energy production is gathering force globally, but has yet to see a significant pickup in the Garden State, according to one expert.

Global wind power capacity grew by 38,343 megawatts, to a total of 158,505 megawatts in 2009, according to a new report from the Worldwatch Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based research organization. Amid the economic downturn, new wind-power capacity rose by more than 31 percent, the highest rate in the last eight years, the report said.

But those winds of change aren't blowing in New Jersey, which lags the rest of the country in wind energy generation, said **Matt Elliott**, clean energy advocate at Environment New Jersey, in Trenton. The one major wind project in the state is an installation of five wind turbines in Atlantic City totaling 7.5 megawatts of energy, enough to power 2,500 homes.

But the state's lack of a competitive edge in wind energy is only because it hasn't yet tapped into offshore wind. While the state doesn't have a lot of land for onshore wind facilities, "we have some of the best offshore wind resources in the country," Elliott said. "That's where people have seen real potential for wind in New Jersey."

The state has set aggressive wind energy goals under its [energy master plan](#), and has targeted generating 3,000 megawatts of offshore wind energy by 2020, he said. Because of this, three wind energy companies — **Fishermen's Energy**, **Deepwater Wind** and **Bluewater Wind** — have all set up in New Jersey in the past five years, each with plans to build offshore wind farms producing 1,000 megawatts of energy.

One big stumbling block to ramping up offshore wind energy production is on the federal level, Elliott said. The **Barack Obama** administration has developed a process for vetting offshore wind projects that "is very cumbersome," involving multiple stages and multiple impact studies, he said: "You can build a coal power plant or nuclear power plant much more quickly than a wind farm at this point."

On a state level, more action was needed on the part of Gov. **Chris Christie**, Elliott said, noting that while the governor's cuts to the state's clean energy program "were a disaster," the one area he didn't cut was incentives for offshore wind. "All his actions so far have been nothing but hurtful for the clean-energy market," he said. "Offshore wind is where the governor can really get out in front and start leading."

E-mail Evelyn Lee at elee@njbiz.com

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