

USA: Offshore wind turbines a windy topic in NJ

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Tapping renewable offshore wind energy is a hot topic this week, following federal approval of a controversial wind farm proposal for Nantucket Sound off Massachusetts.

Today, Fishermen's Energy of New Jersey LLC is announcing the installation of a buoy to monitor wind and other environmental conditions nearly 3 miles off Atlantic City over the next two years.

The company wants to develop a wind farm with 66 turbines about 7 miles off the city, according to its Web site.

Garden State Offshore Energy and NRG Bluewater Wind also would like to build wind farms with dozens of turbines well off the southern New Jersey coast.

Tomorrow, Reps. Frank J. Pallone Jr. and Rush D. Holt and Sens. Frank R. Lautenberg and Robert Menendez, all D-N.J., are scheduled to announce a plan to encourage offshore wind energy as opposed to offshore drilling. Jeff Tittel of the Sierra Club's New Jersey chapter, Cindy Zipf of Clean Ocean Action and Neptune officials are to join them.

Both Gov. Chris Christie and state Environmental Commissioner Bob Martin have issued statements supporting the harnessing of offshore wind energy.

In 2006, the state Blue Ribbon Panel on Development of Wind Turbine Facilities in Coastal Waters recommended the construction of a pilot project with as many as 80 wind turbines. It would be a good idea to evaluate the environmental and economic costs and benefits of turbines prior to developing more projects, according to the panel.

But former Gov. Jon S. Corzine's energy master plan calls for developing at least 1,000 megawatts of offshore wind power by the end of 2012 and at least 3,000 megawatts by 2020.

That would mean hundreds and hundreds of turbines, so the plan for a pilot project was changed, a state official last year.

Instead, data from multiple projects will be used to determine the conditions that may need to be attached to future projects, the official said.

Meanwhile, a state Department of Environmental Protection consultant has been conducting an ecological study of the birds, marine mammals, sea turtles and other species in a region up to 23 miles offshore, from Seaside Heights to Stone Harbor.

And not everyone is thrilled with the prospect of wind turbines off the Jersey Shore.

The Sandy Hook-based American Littoral Society and other groups developed a skeptical position paper on offshore wind several years ago.

“While we believe that industrial offshore windmillfarms may present an opportunity to advance renewable energy generation, the state’s current approach raises serious questions about how adequately possible environmental impacts and use conflicts are being anticipated and addressed,” the paper says. “It also raises important questions as to how the state government makes decisions about industrial activities that impact the marine environment,” the paper says.

Clean Ocean Action today released a letter outlining its view of a proposed Fishermen’s Energy of New Jersey

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pilot project.