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■ Debate



Our view on alternative power: Cape Wind battles reflect lack of energy seriousness

Approve project. NIMBY politics only feeds fossil fuel dependence.

The steady winds that blow along the nation's coastlines are an untapped energy resource that could reduce the need for coal, oil and natural gas. In fact, one group proposed placing enough windmills in Nantucket Sound to [supply 75%](#) of the Cape Cod area's electricity needs.

That was nine years ago.

The battles since then vividly illustrate why wind energy still provides [just one-half of 1%](#) of the nation's energy, and why all alternative energy accounts for less than 5%. Virtually everyone agrees that the country's dependence on coal and foreign oil is destructive. But when the time arrives to actually do something, the response is too often "not here" or "not now."

Exhibit A is the project known as [Cape Wind](#), which would build 130 huge turbines in about 25 square miles of ocean between Cape Cod and the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. Critics have raised objections about fishing, boating, aviation, federal subsidies, the price of wind energy and, most recently, [the right of nearby Indian tribes](#) to have an uninterrupted view of the morning sunrise. Some of the most bitter complaints seem to come from deep-pocketed landowners who don't want to look at windmills.

Yes, the turbines would be visible, if distant, on the horizon. But the site is close to perfect for a wind farm — in shallow water that makes construction easier and cheaper, partially sheltered from North Atlantic storms and close enough to shore that transmission costs would be minimized. Critics want the turbines out to sea and out of sight, which would raise costs and require still-developing technology.

[For years](#), the objections have had ample hearing before state and federal regulators, almost all of whom have approved Cape Wind or suggested simple ways to mitigate problems. [This week](#),

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is to meet with interested parties to work out an agreement. Failing a compromise, Salazar has hinted he'll issue the final go-ahead.

Here's hoping he does, both to advance a worthy project and to signal that the nation will not let lesser considerations block the path toward energy independence. Obstructionism is everywhere, not just in "not in my backyard" groups. The Senate, for example, has been the graveyard for efforts to put market forces to work by requiring that utilities get a minimum amount of electricity from alternative energy by a particular date — say, 20% by 2020. [At least 27 states](#) have set such goals, and some have even increased them after meeting early targets. The Senate has rejected national standards in part due to objections from Southern senators, who say the region lacks sufficient solar and wind resources.

On another front, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and the Obama administration have slowed a vital push for more nuclear power plants by withdrawing support for the Yucca Mountain waste repository in Nevada and raising more doubts about plant security and proliferation, issues that have been researched to death.

The hazards of limitless emissions of greenhouse gases have been clear for a long time, and it has been a year and a half since [\\$4-a-gallon gasoline](#) sent yet another wake-up call about the nation's ruinous addiction to imported oil. Meanwhile, [the Chinese are taking a huge lead](#) in building solar power equipment, and [the Europeans are moving ahead](#) with wind. [What's happening in the USA?](#) Mostly bickering, debating and stalling. It is past time to get serious.

Opposing view: Not every location works

Consider alternatives to fatally flawed site in Nantucket Sound.

By Audra Parker

On the surface it is easy to support green energy, but not every location works, particularly one that industrializes a national treasure and tramples the religious rights of Native Americans.

The National Park Service is right: Nantucket Sound is a culturally, environmentally and historically significant national treasure, one that deserves protection on the National Register of Historic Places.

Cape Wind could not have picked a worse location to crowd with 130 massive steel towers. The desecration of tribal land is just the tip of the iceberg; the Coast Guard has told fishermen they will have to earn their livelihoods elsewhere, and the FAA has called the project "[a presumed hazard](#)" to aviation safety. Cape Wind presents a menace to tourism, a danger to threatened birds and marine life, and an end to the majestic beauty of Cape Cod and the Islands.

For nine long years, virtually every stakeholder group has opposed this fatally flawed project — ferries, fishermen, tribes, airports, chambers of commerce, environmental groups, elected

officials and, increasingly, ratepayers who would have to pay for the power that the U.S. government says [would cost double](#) that of existing sources, even after \$1 billion of taxpayer dollars.

The central issue has not changed from day one when Cape Wind staked out Nantucket Sound and refused to consider alternatives. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and the Obama administration need to ask: Should the first offshore wind project in this country be built by ignoring public safety, trampling tribal religious rights, flouting local governance, and seizing public lands already fully utilized by fishermen and boaters?

None of this means that there is no place for wind power. There is. And when we meet this week in Washington, the government will have to face its long ignored duty to consider alternatives and discuss relocation of this doomed project site.

There are many viable alternatives outside of Nantucket Sound that respect tribal rights, don't risk lives and preserve the heart and soul of the Cape and Islands. Secretary Salazar has a historic opportunity to craft a win-win solution, avoid years of conflict and get a project actually built — rather than sent to court for the next decade.

Secretary Salazar: Say "yes" to wind, but "NO" to Cape Wind in Nantucket Sound.

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