

Report -- offshore wind holds twice the promise of offshore drilling

Wind farms off the U.S. East Coast would produce way more energy and jobs than drilling, a new report finds

Lindsay Abrams, Salon, 1-15-15

If you're still not convinced about the incredible, under-realized potential of a green energy economy, the conservation group Oceana is out with a new [report](#) analyzing the prospects for energy production off the U.S. East Coast. And offshore wind, it concludes, has twice the potential of offshore drilling.

That's twice the jobs, and twice the amount of energy that could be produced.

Over the next 20 years, according to the report, offshore wind in the Atlantic could produce up to 143 gigawatts of power, enough to power 115 million households. Just 13 years of production would provide more energy than the grand total available from economically recoverable oil and gas in the area. And wind, in those first 20 years, could create over 218,000 lifetime jobs — 91,000 more than offshore drilling.

It's not that we're necessarily looking at an either/or choice. But by providing an “apples-to-apples” comparison of the two energy strategies, the report makes a strong case for which to prioritize.

There's also that strong pro-climate and environmental case to be made for throwing weight behind wind. Taking into account the potential for destruction by drilling, the report adds that oil and gas production threatens an additional 1.4 million jobs and \$95 billion in GDP from industries like fishing and tourism, which rely on healthy waters.

“Based on the government's own estimates, seismic blasting in the Atlantic could harm fish populations while injuring as many as 138,000 marine mammals like whales and dolphins, disturbing the vital activities of as many as 13.5 million more,” Andrew Menaquale, the report's author, said in a statement. “Instead of working to fully understand the implications of rushing to develop offshore oil and gas, our elected officials are being blinded by imaginary short-term profits and missing the real opportunity that wind provides.”

Still, despite the many promising statistics coming out about the promise of East Coast wind development — that wind farms could power a full third of the U.S., for example, or that they could tame hurricanes — the total number of wind farms in any U.S. waters remains zero. One particularly promising project, which was to be developed in the Nantucket Sound, recently lost its contract with Massachusetts' two largest utilities. The potential is staggering; the question now is whether we'll be able to do what it takes to harness it.