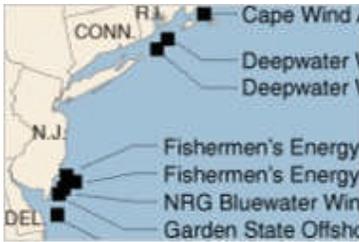


First Offshore Wind Farm in U.S. Is Approved

By KATHARINE Q. SEELYE, NY Times

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BOSTON — After nine years of regulatory review, the federal government gave the green light Wednesday to the nation's first offshore wind farm, a highly contested project off the coast of Cape Cod.



Map

The approval of the 130-turbine farm gives a significant boost to the nascent offshore wind industry in the United States, which has lagged far behind Europe and China in harnessing the strong and steady power of ocean breezes to provide electricity to homes and businesses.

With Gov. Deval Patrick standing beside him, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced at a news conference at the Massachusetts Statehouse that the government had approved a permit for Cape Wind Associates, a private venture, to build the farm.

“I am approving the Cape Wind project,” Mr. Salazar said. “This will be the first of many projects up and down the Atlantic coast.”

The Cape Wind turbines would lie in Nantucket Sound, about five miles from the nearest shoreline, and cover 24 square miles, roughly the size of Manhattan. The tip of the highest blade of each turbine would reach 440 feet above the water.

But the project is hardly shovel ready. Several regulatory hurdles remain, and opponents of the wind farm have vowed to go to court, potentially stalling Cape Wind for several more years.

For years the Cape Wind project has been the focus of pitched battles splitting politicians and environmental groups. While some environmentalists are prepared to go to court to stop the project, other major groups, including the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, support it.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, whose family compound overlooks Nantucket Sound and who died last year, had opposed the project, saying it was a giveaway to a private developer.

Senator Scott Brown, Republican of Massachusetts, issued a statement opposing the decision immediately after it was announced, saying it would hinder tourism and boating in the area.

But Mr. Patrick, also a Democrat, has supported it.

“America needs offshore wind power, and with this project, Massachusetts will lead the nation,” Mr. Patrick declared at the Statehouse on Wednesday. While there are differences of opinion, he said, “on balance, Cape Wind is good for our environment and good for our energy needs.”

He added that construction could begin within a year. “We are on our way,” he said. “If we get clean energy right, the whole world will be our customer.”

Ian Bowles, secretary of the Massachusetts executive office of environmental affairs, called the announcement “the shot heard ’round the world for American clean energy.”

At least half a dozen offshore wind farms have been proposed along the East Coast and the Great Lakes. Their relatively shallow waters make wind energy more feasible than off the West Coast, where the ocean floor drops off precipitously.

Supporters say the \$1 billion Cape Wind project would provide a clean, renewable source of energy that could meet up to 75 percent of the power needs on Cape Cod, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket. They also say it would provide hundreds of construction jobs, decrease the region’s reliance on fossil fuels and benefit the environment by lowering emissions of greenhouse gases.

Opponents say it would be an industrial blot in an area of pristine beauty and change the region’s historic character. They also warn that the costs to consumers are likely to be double or triple the costs for conventional power. Improvements to the region’s electrical grid and transmission lines could cost \$10 billion.

Audra Parker, president and chief executive of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, said that several groups would go to court to halt the project. While the permit is “a significant piece of the puzzle,” she warned, other pieces must still be put in place to get the project under way.

The Federal Aviation Administration has yet to make a final determination on the project, which it has rated “a presumed hazard” because of potential interference with airplane radar, she said. And Cape Wind has yet to sign a contract with the local utility, National Grid, to carry the wind power, she noted.

She said that nine state and local permits were still being appealed in the courts. And nearly a dozen parties have filed notices of intention to sue, saying the project violates various environmental rules and regulations.

Asked about future hurdles, Mr. Salazar said, “This is the final decision of the United States of America.” While delays could result from challenges, he said, he was “confident” that the courts would uphold his decision.

Officials said the official record of the decision, to be made available later, would spell out ways in which the government could mitigate any negative effects on coastal views by adjusting the number, orientation and color of the turbines.

The coastal Wampanoag tribe, which requires unobstructed views of the sunrise for sacred ceremonies, said Monday that it was preparing to challenge the project for violations of tribal rights.

“We will not stand by and allow our treasured public lands to be marred forever by a corporate giveaway to private industrial energy developers,” Ms. Parker said.

US government approves first offshore wind farm

US Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has approved controversial plans for the country's first offshore wind farm to operate off Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

"This project fits with the tradition of sustainable development in the area," he told reporters in Boston.

State Governor Deval Patrick has argued the farm is key to local efforts to increase the use of renewable energy.

But the late Senator Edward Kennedy strongly opposed the idea, which some fear would spoil the seascape.

The plan would see 130 wind-powered turbines erected in the shallow waters of the sound, visible from the Kennedy family compound in Hyannisport and other Cape Cod estates.

Native Americans in Massachusetts have argued the turbine blades would desecrate the view of the sunrise that is essential to their prayer ceremonies.

Cape Wind says it can generate power by 2012 and aims to eventually supply three-quarters of the power on Cape Cod, which has about 225,000 residents.

