

Nantucket Sound sanctuary proposal renewed Delahunt move could block wind-farm effort

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By staff writers Jack Coleman and John Leaning

HYANNIS - U.S. Rep. William Delahunt has dusted off dormant legislation to make Nantucket Sound a national marine sanctuary, a proposal that could block a proposed offshore wind farm.

Delahunt said he is awaiting a report on Nantucket Sound from the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, but said that based on what he has heard from the center, he plans to refile sanctuary legislation first proposed in 1980.

"Here's the bottom line: Nantucket Sound ought not to be developed," Delahunt said.

Cape Wind Associates of Yarmouth and Boston wants to build 170 wind turbines across 28 square miles of Nantucket Sound, a \$500 million to \$700 million project that would supply three-quarters of the electricity used on the Cape and islands.

The proposal has drawn opposition from the Cape-based Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound group, whose members contend that environmental harm, visual blight and damage to tourism from the project far outweigh its benefits as a source of non-polluting, renewable energy.

"The permitting process is totally inadequate," Delahunt said. "We don't have a thoughtful permitting process in place now."

National marine sanctuaries were first created in the early 1970s as a way to protect sensitive coastal areas from development. Since then, 13 sanctuaries have been created, including one at Stellwagen Bank, a rich fishing ground and whale habitat just outside Massachusetts Bay.

Cape Wind spokesman Mark Rodgers said company officials would not comment on Delahunt's proposal until they had a chance to study it further.

Warm reception

Delahunt's suggestion was met with enthusiasm from Isaac Rosen, executive director of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound.

"We applaud Rep. Delahunt for listening to his constituents, including the residents, the environmental groups and the fishermen, who have said in no uncertain terms that Nantucket Sound is not for sale," Rosen said.

"We embrace renewable energy but not when it amounts to a corporate land grab of an environmental resource like Nantucket Sound," Rosen said.

While the Center for Coastal Study's report is almost finished, director Peter Borrelli declined to discuss specifics until he gives the final document to Delahunt's office Friday.

"You'll have to get details from his office," Borrelli said yesterday as he was editing a draft version of the 20-page report.

But Borrelli did sketch out what the report considered, and he indicated that more detailed information on the area may be needed before any final course of action is adopted.

"Even before we began this process, we sensed there was a dearth of information, and that clearly seems to be the case," he said.

Borrelli said scientists at the center were asked by Delahunt to look at what the "ecological relevance and significance of this area."

Management strategies

The report also will include evaluations of various management strategies for Nantucket Sound, looking specifically at the 1980 proposal from the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs that proposed the area as national marine sanctuary.

Given the variety of interests and jurisdictions in Nantucket Sound, Borrelli said the report looks at the current situation to "see if we can come up with some useful recommendations to address the situation."

One irony in the discussion over nominating Nantucket Sound as a national marine sanctuary is that under state law such projects may be legal within three miles of the coast.

Under the current state ocean sanctuary provisions, law, which extend three miles out into the sound, such structures as those "associated with the generation, transmission and distribution of electric power" are permitted, so long as all applicable state and federal permits and reviews are obtained and completed.

Delahunt conceded yesterday that a marine sanctuary designation could prove difficult to obtain.

"I'd be cautious about raising expectations," he said. "These things don't happen quickly."

Rosen said Delahunt could expect help from the members of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound.

An aide to U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy said the state's senior senator "believes that Nantucket Sound is a national treasure and may even meet many of the criteria for a sanctuary."

"We're taking a look at it but have not fully considered if it is the right step to protect the sound and other local interests," said Kennedy aide Stephanie Cutter.

Kelley Benander, an aide to U.S. Sen. John Kerry, said Delahunt's proposal is "worthy of evaluation within the overall process."

Kennedy and Kerry are prospective abutters of the wind farm by virtue of their seasonal homes in Hyannisport and Nantucket.

And while the debate over the Cape Wind proposal rages, the developer continues to make progress with the data-collection tower.

Although there were concerns bad weather might delay completion of the tower, a break last Saturday gave workers a window to complete erection of the 198-foot, \$2 million steel tower.

What remains is the installation of sophisticated meteorological and oceanographic equipment in the water and on the tower to collect information on wind speeds, water temperatures, wave height and other pertinent information.

That data will be shared with educational institutions, including Cape Cod Community College, Massachusetts Maritime Academy and the University of Massachusetts, and will be used to provide technical information to state and federal regulatory agencies.

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