

# An Ill Wind Off Cape Cod

By ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.

The New York Times

December 16, 2005

As an environmentalist, I support wind power, including wind power on the high seas. I am also involved in siting wind farms in appropriate landscapes, of which there are many. But I do believe that some places should be off limits to any sort of industrial development. I wouldn't build a wind farm in Yosemite National Park. Nor would I build one on Nantucket Sound, which is exactly what the company Energy Management is trying to do with its Cape Wind project.

Environmental groups have been enticed by Cape Wind, but they should be wary of lending support to energy companies that are trying to privatize the commons -- in this case 24 square miles of a heavily used waterway. And because offshore wind costs twice as much as gas-fired electricity and significantly more than onshore wind, the project is financially feasible only because the federal and state governments have promised \$241 million in subsidies.

Cape Wind's proposal involves construction of 130 giant turbines whose windmill arms will reach 417 feet above the water and be visible for up to 26 miles. These turbines are less than six miles from shore and would be seen from Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Hundreds of flashing lights to warn airplanes away from the turbines will steal the stars and nighttime views. The noise of the turbines will be audible onshore. A transformer substation rising 100 feet above the sound would house giant helicopter pads and 40,000 gallons of potentially hazardous oil.

According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the project will damage the views from 16 historic sites and lighthouses on the cape and nearby islands. The Humane Society estimates the whirling turbines could every year kill thousands of migrating songbirds and sea ducks. Nantucket Sound is among the most densely traveled boating corridors in the Atlantic. The turbines will be perilously close to the main navigation channels for cargo ships, ferries and fishing boats. The risk of collisions with the towers would increase during the fogs and storms for which the area is famous. That is why the Steamship Authority and Hy-Line Cruises, which transport millions of passengers to and from the cape and islands every year, oppose the project. Thousands of small businesses, including marina owners, hotels, motels, whale watching tours and charter fishing operations will also be hurt. The Beacon Hill Institute at Suffolk University in Boston estimates a loss of up to 2,533 jobs because of the loss of tourism -- and over a billion dollars to the local economy.

Nantucket Sound is a critical fishing ground for the commercial fishing families of Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod. Hundreds of fishermen work Horseshoe Shoal, where the Cape Wind project would be built, and make half their annual income from the catch. The risks that their gear will become fouled in the spider web of cables between the 130 towers will largely preclude fishing in the area, destroying family-owned businesses that enrich the palate, economy and culture of Cape Cod.

Many environmental groups support the Cape Wind project, and that's unfortunate because making enemies of fishermen and marina owners is bad environmental strategy in the long run. Cape Cod's traditional-gear commercial fishing families and its recreational anglers and marina owners have all been important allies for environmentalists in our battles for clean water.

There are those who argue that unlike our great Western national parks, Cape Cod is far from pristine, and that Cape Wind's turbines won't be a significant blot. I invite these critics to see the pods of humpback, minke, pilot, finback and right whales off Nantucket, to marvel at the thousands of harbor and gray seals lolling on the bars off Monomoy and Horseshoe Shoal, to chase the dark clouds of terns and shorebirds descending over the thick menhaden schools exploding over acre-sized feeding frenzies of striped bass, bluefish and bonita.

I urge them to come diving on some of the hundreds of historic wrecks in this "graveyard of the Atlantic," and to visit the endless dune-covered beaches of Cape Cod, our fishing villages immersed in history and beauty, or to spend an afternoon netting blue crabs or mucking clams, quahogs and scallops by the bushel on tidal mud flats -- some of the reasons my uncle, John F. Kennedy, authorized the creation of the Cape Cod National Seashore in 1961, and why Nantucket Sound is under consideration as a national marine sanctuary, a designation that would prohibit commercial electrical generation.

All of us need periodically to experience wilderness to renew our spirits and reconnect ourselves to the common history of our nation, humanity and to God. The worst trap that environmentalists can fall into is the conviction that the only wilderness worth preserving is in the Rocky Mountains or Alaska. To the contrary, our most important wildernesses are those that are closest to our densest population centers, like Nantucket Sound.

There are many alternatives that would achieve the same benefits as Cape Wind without destroying this national treasure. Deep water technology is rapidly evolving, promising huge bounties of wind energy with fewer environmental and economic consequences. Scotland is preparing to build wind turbines in the Moray Firth more than 12 miles offshore. Germany is considering placing turbines as far as 27 miles off its northern shores.

If Cape Wind were to place its project further offshore, it could build not just 130, but thousands of windmills -- where they can make a real difference in the battle against global warming without endangering the birds or impoverishing the experience of millions of tourists and residents and fishing families who rely on the sound's unspoiled bounties.