



Time was when the ex-hippies and liberal stalwarts living on Cape Cod would have said that alternative energy was a force worth fighting for. But then someone actually proposed building 130 windmills in the ocean right off their beach.

A Mighty Wind

By Elinor Burkett

The buzz on Cape Cod is grim as summer approaches. There is little talk about beach permits or Kennedy sightings and much talk about dead birds littering beaches, jellyfish clogging waterways and tourism collapsing. Even Walter Cronkite, America's *éminence grise*, has issued a dire warning from his second home on Martha's Vineyard. "I'm very concerned about a private developer's plan to build an industrial energy complex across 24 square miles of publicly owned land," Cronkite intoned in a radio and television ad recently broadcast across the Cape.

The industrial energy complex in question is a wind farm. And the publicly owned land is really water — Nantucket Sound, which separates the Cape from Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. That is where a Boston-based company called Cape Wind Associates hopes to build America's first offshore wind farm. At a cost in excess of \$700 million, Cape Wind plans to spread 130 windmills, spaced a third to a half of a mile apart, across a shoal less than seven miles off the coast of Hyannis. Embedded in the ocean floor, each turbine would tower higher than the top of the Statue of Liberty's torch, its three 161-foot blades churning at 16 revolutions per minute. The wind forest promises to provide Cape Codders, on average, with 75 percent of their electricity, 1.8 percent of the total electrical needs of New England, without emitting a single microgram of greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide or mercury and without burning a single barrel of Middle Eastern oil.



> Seascape

A simulated view, part of an impact study commissioned by the developer, of what the wind farm in Nantucket Sound would look like from Craigville Beach. Environmental advocacy groups and their supporters have long been enthusiastic about harnessing wind as a power source. But on Cape Cod, a classic great-idea-but-not-here battle is under way.

The nation's leading environmental groups can barely control their enthusiasm. "We're bullish on wind," says Kert Davies, research director of Greenpeace USA. "Everybody has to ante up in the fight."

But like residents of dozens of communities where other wind-farm projects have been proposed, many Cape Codders have put aside their larger environmental sensitivities and are demanding that their home be exempt from such projects. As Cronkite puts it, "Our national treasures should be off limits to industrialization."

WIND IS THE WORLD'S fastest-growing energy resource, and after a decade of federal and state subsidies kick-starting the industry, creating enough power for more than a million American families in 27 states to tap into the breeze

when they flick on their light switches. The country's oldest turbines have been part of the landscape on the Altamont Pass, east of San Francisco, for two decades. And Texans zooming along I-10 west to El Paso top a slight rise to the sight of a vast field of turbines stretching across the mesa. But energy providers in the Northeast, with its lack of wide open spaces, have long been consigned to dependence on oil, coal and natural gas, with only the occasional small-scale wind project.

Then Jim Gordon got restless. The president of Cape Wind, Gordon is a quixotic sort of energy executive. At the age of 22, he put aside his dream of becoming Francis Ford Coppola and instead started a small company that designed and installed heat-recovery systems for hospitals and factories. Ten years later, after a

change in regulatory law opened a niche for independent power producers, he pioneered the building of natural-gas-generated electric plants in New England, a region long captive to highly polluting coal and oil.

Gordon eventually developed seven power plants throughout New England and became a very wealthy man. But with too much "creative juice," as he puts it, to rest on what he had already done, he went looking for the next challenge. Wind became his fixation.

"Imagine tapping into this inexhaustible supply of energy right here in our own state, lowering the cost of electricity, decreasing pollution, reducing reliance on foreign fuel," Gordon said recently as he paced his company's boardroom in downtown Boston. "We're feeding oil cartels whose whims move our economy

and our armies. With wind, we can free ourselves from that."

In 1999, Gordon sold off his power plants. With a Department of Energy wind map in hand, he and his team began searching for a place to build dozens of technologically advanced turbines that would plug directly into the region's energy grid. If he had been building in the West, Gordon would have looked to the plains, what those in the wind industry call "the Saudi Arabia of wind." It being New England, he naturally looked to the mountains. But while the ridges of northern Maine offered plenty of gusts, he says, the transmission lines out of such underpopulated areas were already clogged. His eyes then fell on the sea.

Europeans had been constructing offshore wind farms for more than a decade. Just two miles outside of Copenhagen harbor, 20 turbines provide enough electricity for 32,000 homes. The British are developing more than a dozen wind projects in the Irish and North Seas. And a wind farm south of Dublin is expected to produce 10 percent of Ireland's electricity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 13 million tons per year.

"The Europeans are years ahead of us because they have had a consistent national policy to support wind power," Gordon said. Undaunted by the federal government's ambivalence toward alternative energy, Gordon sent his engineers out to find the perfect locale for a water-based wind farm. What they needed were fairly shallow waters, protection from the Atlantic's perfect storms, isolation from main shipping channels, easy access to the electrical grid and, of course, wind — an annual average of 18 miles per hour. The ideal spot, it turned out, is smack in the middle of Nantucket Sound, in the federal waters of Horseshoe Shoal, less than seven miles from the Kennedy compound.

CAPE CODDERS tend to be vain about their environmental sensitivities, so you would think they'd cheer the coming of alternative energy. But supporting the construction of dozens of

towering turbines visible from their beaches, boats and waterfront homes is a very different thing from avoiding tern nesting grounds or attending a lecture on shoreline erosion. Even before Gordon finished his analysis of the shoal's sands, a forceful and well-connected army of opposition had formed.

Wayne Kurker, the owner of Hyannis Marina, set about issuing dire warnings of the "industrial park" being planned for the sound. When his

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neighbors ignored him, Kurker asked a graphic artist to create a mock-up of the proposed wind project and mailed it to thousands of boaters. His mantra was simple: "Windmills are probably great for the environment, but we shouldn't have to sacrifice the environment to build renewable energy."

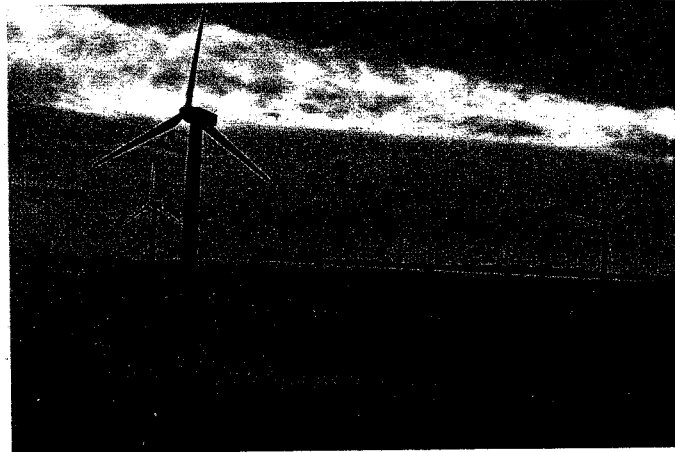
Soon, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound was filing lawsuits, mounting political pressure in Boston and Washington and, to bolster its legal case and maximize public anxiety, generating volumes of doomsaying critiques: The turbines will break up and the oil inside will spill into the sound, in a repeat of the Exxon Valdez disaster. Birds will be torn apart in "pole-mounted Cuisinarts." Whales will bump their heads. The annual Figawi race, the Memorial Day weekend Hyannis-to-Nantucket regatta, will have to be canceled. The pristine sound will become the world's 11th largest skyline, flashing 520 red and amber lights.

Representative William Delahunt spearheaded an effort to protect the sound by advocating that it be declared a national marine sanctuary. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. offered his name and voice to the struggle, despite the fact that the Natural Resources Defense Council, the environmental organization for which he is a senior attorney, is a strong advocate of offshore wind development. And the yacht-club set opened its checkbooks, donating money and stock to cover the \$100,000-a-month bills for rent, three full-time salaries, television and radio time, two lobbyists and three law firms.

The alliance's legal strategists are basing their opposition to Cape Wind's proposal on what they say they believe is the absence of sufficient regulation of the private use of federal waters. "A for-profit company is taking advantage of a loophole in federal law," says Isaac Rosen, the Woody Allen-ish executive director of the alliance. "Developers cannot be allowed to swoop down, stick their shovels in the ground and claim a piece of the public waters for themselves. If they're allowed to do so, pretty soon we'll have liquid natural gas processing platforms in the sound, offshore casinos. It will be like the gold rush."

To bolster the legal struggle, Rosen also set about amassing a kind of Cape Cod-style Rainbow Coalition. He brought aboard commercial fishermen to decry the despoiling of their fishing grounds, motel owners worried about an eyesore that would send beachgoers north to Maine and boaters afraid that their small craft could crash up against the massive structures.

Environmentalists across the country chafe at what they see as the hypocrisy of those supposed Greens on the Cape who oppose the windmills. "The opponents of Cape Wind say they support



> Au Courant

In Europe, offshore wind farms are old news. This 10-turbine facility in Denmark was built in 1995 off the coast of Tuno Island in the Kattegatt strait.

renewable energy, but exactly what do they support?" asks Seth Kaplan of the Conservation Law Foundation, who admits he is more comfortable suing corporations than siding with them. "One or two turbines at town landfills? That's not going to solve global warming."

Kaplan, like many other environmental advocates, also challenges the alliance's penchant for overstatement: whales will not be harmed, because their sonar allows them to avoid large objects; birds might be killed in the turbines, but at the rate of one or two per year; the turbines contain little oil, so a Valdez replay is impossible.

But nowhere has the alliance been more bitterly accused of peddling half-truths than in local environmental circles. "The sound is not pristine," says Matt Patrick, a member of the State Legislature whose support for the plan greatly compromised his re-election campaign. "You can't get to shore because it is lined with memorials to bad taste. Motorboats race around it, and if you go offshore in the summer, you look back and see yellow brown haze hanging over the mainland. And they make it sound as if Nantucket Sound will look like downtown New York, but the wind farm will be only a thumbnail on the horizon."

Dick Elrick, a Barnstable councilman who has been a ferryboat captain for two decades, is even angrier. "It's tough to listen to the same fishermen who have hurt the habitat by overdragging the bottom of the sound waving the flag of environmentalism," he says. "This isn't environmentalism; it's the not-in-my-backyard syndrome."

Walter Cronkite squirmed a bit at this characterization. "The problem really is Nimbyism," he admitted when I reached him by phone not long ago, "and it bothers me a great deal that I find myself in this position. I'm all for these factories, but there must be areas that are far less valuable than this place is." With prodding, he suggested the deserts of California. Then, perhaps realizing that might be a tad remote to serve New England's energy needs,

he added, "Inland New England would substitute just as well."

As we talked, his discomfort was so keen that he interrupted his thought and pleaded, "Be kind to an old man," before summing up. "We have a lot of interesting wildlife, like porpoises and whales," he said. "It's a very important commercial fishing ground, and it's a marvelous boating area for recreational fishermen, for sailors. Last — but this is not inconsequential — it will be most unsightly for what is now open bay. Everybody will see it, anyone who wanders on the water, who has a home that faces the water."

This is a familiar refrain from wind-farm opponents across the country who insist on the intrinsic value of their neighborhoods. Activists in the mountains of Tennessee blocked the Tennessee Valley Authority from building 13 to 16 windmills on the ridgeline of Stone Mountain, despite the 33 metric tons of bomb-grade uranium that have been trucked in to nearby Erwin to power nuclear reactors. Their complaints? Up to 120 birds would be sucked into the turbines annually, and Weller's salamanders might be bombarded by spare electrons.

In Rosalia, Kan., residents pleaded the potential damage to native tall grass and the possible harm to the nesting grounds of prairie chickens. In Maine, hikers feared turbines would be within sight of a stretch of the Appalachian Trail. In rural Illinois, one farmer complained that it was "very annoying, seeing all this spinning around."

No matter how baseless the fears, everywhere the polemic is identical: we're not opposed to wind power, but this is not the right place.

"Traditionally, power plants were built in poor neighborhoods, so people living in nice neighborhoods weren't forced to confront the human cost of using electricity," said Greg Watson of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, an agency that administers Massachusetts's renewable energy trust. "But unlike coal, oil or natural gas, which you can truck, pipe or barge, Mother Nature dictates where you can locate a wind farm."

THIS IS NOT, like most anticorporate sagas, a David and Goliath tale. Despite the alliance's portrayal of Cape Wind as an "energy giant," nothing about Jim Gordon suggests evil capitalist or environmental rapist. During his 25 years in the energy business, he has never fallen afoul of the Environmental Protection Agency and has even won the admiration of notoriously feisty Greens. "Jim Gordon is the real thing," says Kert Davies of Greenpeace. "There aren't many entrepreneurs out there willing to take risks to clean up the environment."

The members of the alliance's board are similarly miscast in their self-assigned roles as small-town folk fighting corporate greed. Over the past several years, Wayne Kurker infuriated many Cape environmentalists when he expand-

ed his Hyannis Marina by erecting corrugated metal hangars along the harbor. And the group's president, Doug Yearley, is a former C.E.O. of Phelps Dodge, one of the world's leading copper-mining companies. The alliance's lobbyist, John O'Brien, is a principal in a Boston firm that represents Exelon Generation, one of the largest fossil-fuel generating companies in the United States. Its Washington attorney is Guy Martin, a former assistant secretary of the interior. And, of course, there is the high-profile support of Robert Kennedy Jr.

"I am all for wind power," Kennedy insisted in a debate with Gordon on Boston's NPR affiliate. "The costs . . . on the people of this region are so huge, . . . the diminishment to property values, the diminishment to marinas, to businesses. . . . People go to the Cape because they want to connect themselves with the history and the culture. They want to see the same scenes the Pilgrims saw when they landed at Plymouth Rock." (It should be

tion when I heard about them was that it was a front for the coal industry or some other power-industry sector that didn't want wind power to do well," he says. "And when I see who's on their board, I'm still not entirely sure. But I'm certain they're feeding the forces who want to discredit such technologies."

This sort of stance drives alliance supporters to distraction. "The others believe in green power above all," Yearley despairs. "I'm for trying to jump-start alternative energy, but we need to look at the costs. I don't know what the rush is. We're not going to solve global warming overnight."

The wind supporters at least agree with Yearley on one point: the struggle is ultimately about costs — it is about the costs of scattering turbines along ridgelines and sounds versus the costs of not doing so. To them, the national illusion that you can have electricity, clean air, a stable climate and independence from foreign oil without paying a steep price is ludicrous.

'This is all about trade-offs, . . .' one environmentalist says. 'How heavily do you count yachting against the number of people who die from particulate matter?'

pointed out that the Pilgrims never saw Nantucket Sound, and if they had, they wouldn't have spied the Kennedy compound.)

Ultimately, though, the Kennedy that the alliance most wants on its side is Ted, but to date he has made only halting efforts on its behalf. It has managed to garner the support of Gov. Mitt Romney, and the state's attorney general, Tom Reilly, has also joined the antiwind brigade. But since Horseshoal Shoal is in federal waters, the state has little control, and opponents hold out scant hope that their junior senator, John Kerry, will lend them his aid. "Kerry's in a box," says Cliff Schechtman, editor of *The Cape Cod Times*. "He owns a house on Nantucket, but he's running for the presidency on a strong alternative energy platform." So they wait for Teddy to swoop in and introduce legislation that will bring Cape Wind's plans to a stop.

LIKE MANY SERIOUS environmentalists, Deborah Donovan of the Union of Concerned Scientists worries that the alliance's wish will come true and that Kennedy will intervene on its behalf. "Legislative intervention could go on and on every time there's a wind project that politically influential people don't like," she says. "I don't see how anybody would be willing to spend money on this industry."

Greenpeace's Davies suspects that might well be the alliance's real intention. "My gut reac-

In fact, in late April, part of the price Cape Cod is already paying began washing up on its shores. En route to a power plant in Sandwich, on the northwest corner of the Cape, a leaking barge spilled 98,000 gallons of oil into Buzzards Bay. Shellfish beds were closed for a month. At least 370 birds died; 93 miles of coastline were tainted by thick globs of black oil.

"This is all about trade-offs," says Kaplan of the Conservation Law Foundation. "How much weight do you give aesthetics against the weight I give the reduction in CO₂? How heavily do you count yachting against the number of people who die from particulate matter? The opponents say they support renewable energy. But it's not acceptable to say that you're in favor of renewable energy only as long as you can't see it."

Kert Davies agrees. "It feels strange for Greenpeace to be fighting a grass-roots group," he says. "And it's sad for me to be arguing against the Kennedys, the only liberals left, and Cronkite, who is everybody's grandfather. But we, as environmental advocates, have to be consistent, and that includes the Kennedys and Cronkite. It's not fair to stomp about how scary global warming is one week, then oppose this the next. It's not fair, in terms of environmental justice, for communities with cash to demand that projects they don't want be built somewhere else." ■