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Massive wind farm may endanger birds

Would be largest in nation, topping farm in Oregon/Washington

Thursday, May 11, 2006; Posted: 9:09 p.m. EDT (01:09 GMT)

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Texas (AP) -- Texas officials announced plans Thursday for the nation's largest offshore wind farm, consisting of as many as 170 windmills in the Gulf of Mexico.

Houston-based Superior Renewable Energy will build and operate the project, which will be situated within about 10 miles of Padre Island. It is expected to cost \$1 billion to \$2 billion and should be ready in five years.

Its 400-foot turbines would generate a total of 500 megawatts of electricity, or enough energy for 125,000 homes.

"The wind rush is on," Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson said. "We want to be No. 1. We want to attract the businesses that build the turbines, that build the blades."

Some environmentalists said the spinning blades could kill countless rare birds that migrate through the area each year on their way to and from winter grounds in Mexico and Central America.

"You probably couldn't pick a worse location," said Walter Kittelberger, chairman of the Lower Laguna Madre Foundation, an environmental group named for the strip of water between the mainland and Padre Island.

John Calaway, Superior's chief executive, said the company would do everything possible to reduce the threat to migrating birds. "Of course there's going to be some mortality, but we don't think it will be significant," he said.



A Texas company wants to build a wind farm in the Gulf of Mexico, similar to this one in northern Germany.

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Patterson said the wind farm would be situated off a remote, unpopulated part of Padre Island National Seashore. People who are concerned about the farm obstructing the ocean view "shouldn't have a problem," he said. "There's nobody there to look at it."

The offshore farm is the second announced in less than a year for the Texas coast, joining 50 wind turbines planned off Galveston.

Jerome Collins of the Sierra Club said his and other groups support wind energy and hoped to work with energy producers to prevent bird deaths and protect the scenic landscape.

According to the American Wind Energy Association, the U.S. produces 9,149 megawatts of wind power, enough to power 2.3 million homes annually. The largest U.S. wind farm is the Stateline Wind Energy Center on the Oregon-Washington line, producing 300 megawatts of electricity.

The Texas announcement comes amid a bitter fight over a proposed 130-turbine wind farm off Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where residents fear the turbines will be unsightly.

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