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Renewable Energy - the Antidote to Industrialization

Monday, September 27, 2004

By Stacy Clark, Environmental scientist, writer and educator who has visited Cape Cod regularly since 1968

With so many misrepresentations concerning Cape Wind's proposed construction of 130 wind turbines in Nantucket Sound's Horseshoe Shoal continuing to fuel unnecessary public anxiety and fear, it's hard to know which myth to address first.

In their summer 2004 newsletter, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound reports that according to a four-year review of U.S. ocean policy, off-shore wind developments such as the Cape Wind project are "too far in front of national policy."

Is the Alliance suggesting that forward thinking is a problem for a country known around the world for its unparalleled innovations in

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technology and science?

The same newsletter reports, accusatorily, in a page-five headline: "Renewable Energy is Highly Profitable for Developers."

Is the Alliance suggesting that earning a profit is antithetical to the American way of life?

Interesting, considering that Alliance President and CEO, Douglas Yearly, is former CEO, President, and Chairman of Phelps Dodge Corporation, a mining company that profited handsomely from a 131 year-old federal mining law, which enabled the company to acquire mineral rights to over 120,000 acres of land at just five dollars an acre!

In a separate email to Alliance members this summer, Yearly's staff conveyed their peculiar view of the Cape Wind project: "If we don't stay focused on defeating this project, we may well see the industrialization of the Sound."

The industrialization of the Sound?

I hardly think so!

The fact is that the Cape Wind project may well be the antidote to industrialization. The proposed turbines are, after all, capable of

producing two-thirds of the electricity required by the Cape with NO negative impact on local air or water quality.

The same Alliance email asserts that the Cape Wind project will pose "an irreversible threat to the wildlife, economy, and the natural beauty of Cape Cod."

An irreversible threat?

We know that at 16 rotations per minute (rpm), Cape Wind's turbines will have little effect on airborne wildlife. We know, too, that the foundations of offshore wind farms in other areas of the world have attracted a rich variety of marine life. The foundations of Cape Wind's completed data tower are already home to a growing population of sea bass.

We know that an economic study developed by Global Insight on behalf of Cape Wind concluded that, following construction, the Cape Wind project will add an annual permanent employment increase of 154 jobs to Barnstable County, and that labor income will increase by \$6-\$9 million annually.

As for the natural beauty of the Cape, models of the project suggest that, from Hyannis, the turbines will

resemble a row of half-inch high toothpicks on the horizon. But the overall aesthetic appeal of the turbines may have less to do with their precise form and more to do with their intended function. When one considers that the project will eliminate millions of tons of carbon dioxide and other polluting gases from Cape Cod's air each year, maybe it's not surprising that project advocates—all-too-familiar with the damage these pollutants cause—view the turbines as proud symbols of what is best about American innovation and ingenuity.

And, with the American Lung Association reporting this May that air quality on Cape Cod is the worst in the state of Massachusetts, one must wonder whether—in the absence of Cape Wind receiving the go-ahead for their project—Cape residents may one day face the irreversible threat of shorelines marred by smog so displeasing that any debate over the aesthetic appeal of the project would likely be dismissed as irrelevant.

So what IS it exactly that has the Alliance's knickers in such a twist?

With NO world reports of wind spills, NO evidence of wind pollution, NO related human health risks, NO shortage of supply, AND the promise

of cleaner air, it's hard to know.

Perhaps the Alliance is really no more than a front for a group of self-interested property owners in complete denial over the all-too-present environmental and energy crises we face as a nation—and as a planet.

As an environmental scientist, writer and educator, I encourage Cape Cod and her island residents to support Cape Wind's renewable energy initiative.

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