



Wind farms better than offshore rigs

The Daily Advance

Tuesday, October 06, 2009

The winds of change are blowing.

Not that long ago, we oil-starved Americans were ready to let the big rigs drill away off our coasts, so we could produce enough oil to lower gasoline prices and keep our gas-guzzling public happy.

Last year, that hype was heightened when gas prices topped \$4 a gallon.

Two things happened since then. One, oil prices leveled off and gasoline prices stabilized. Then, Barack Obama won, bringing about an energy policy shift that moves us toward cleaner, greener technology and away from carbon-based oil and coal energy with greenhouse gas producing emissions.

Part of the new energy mix is wind, of which our coast has an abundant supply.

Duke Energy is proposing a test project of erecting one to three wind turbines in the Pamlico Sound that could generate enough electricity for 500 to 1,000 homes each.

The upside is over the long term, thousands of windmills could be constructed seven to 10 miles offshore and create thousands of jobs in eastern North Carolina and produce much of our future electricity needs.

The downside is the turbines will rise up to 500 feet tall, and cost up to \$12 million each. Plus, for some of us they could spoil the pristine views we now enjoy along Outer Banks beaches.

Recently, about 500 people attended a presentation of the wind turbines proposal in Buxton, attended by state Sen. Marc Basnight, D-Dare, Gov. Beverly Perdue and hosted by researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Basnight believes the potential benefits of wind power will far outweigh any negatives.

Perdue has said indirectly that wind power might save North Carolina's coasts from becoming havens for oil and gas drilling rigs, which pose a far greater environmental risk to our shorelines and to our tourism industry.

Perdue recently outlined her concerns of coastal oil and gas exploration in a letter to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who is putting together a five-year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2010-15.

"The planning process does not take into consideration potential future uses of renewable sources of energy in the same areas," Perdue wrote. "The governor is committed to exploring all offshore energy sources, including wind and other renewable resources."

At the symposium, Harvey Seim, a marine sciences professor at UNC, said a study conducted on the Pamlico and Albemarle Sounds suggests the areas could be prime locations for wind turbines.

Supporting wind energy was Tim Petit of Duke Energy, a utility that has been at the forefront in generating electricity needs with a mix of nuclear power plants and coal-fired power stations.

It makes good sense, both public relations wise and financially, for Duke to be at the forefront of cleaner energy, including wind power, according to Petit.

"I've heard people say we can't worry about climate change and global warming because we can do everything we want to do and the Chinese don't play," Petit said. "Let me tell you — the Chinese are playing a game; they're all over this issue."

Call it global warming or climate change, the issue is real and our coastal areas are in danger if even the most modest of dire predictions from various scientists come true.

Whether or not everyone agrees that our cars and power plants are causing global warming, it is generally accepted that overall, the world is getting warmer.

We can't control what nature is bent on doing, but we can do something about our how much pollution we produce.

"If the water is rising as predicted, if we take no action, if we sit back in this county of Dare and Hyde, if we absolutely turn our back and we are wrong, we have made a terrible mistake on behalf of the people who follow us," a somber Basnight said.

Sounds like the answer is not only blowing in the wind, but indeed is the wind.

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