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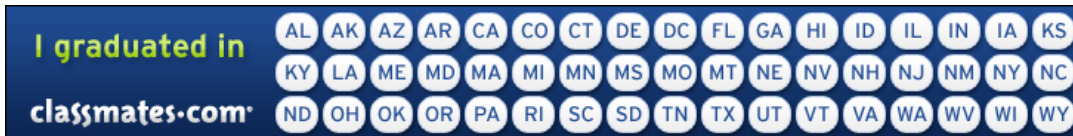
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UNC, Duke Energy will team up to construct first offshore turbines

By Jim Brumm

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The first commercial wind turbines in U.S. waters may be installed within a year in the Pamlico Sound by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke Energy.

The utility said Tuesday it will fund a pilot project calling for construction of up to three demonstration wind turbines in Pamlico Sound.

The project builds on a nine-month study that UNC completed in June for the General Assembly that found “North Carolina is well positioned to develop utility-scale wind energy production.”

The scope of Duke’s funding has not been established, spokesman Tim Pettit said, noting the utility is now selecting a vendor for the turbines.

While the company has a lot of experience with wind farms on land, Pettit said, “we’re interested in the cost” of offshore projects to determine how commercial these efforts might be.

Whether one, two or three turbines are installed as part of the pilot project depends on the cost of turbines, he said. The goal is to have the project in operation within one year, Pettit added.

The pilot study will focus on the waters of Pamlico Sound, between the Outer Banks and the mainland, rather than areas with more wind farther offshore because waters in the sound are under state control, UNC Vice Chancellor Carolyn Elfland explained.

She is the project manager for the UNC Coastal Wind Study, which was presented to the state legislature and continues its efforts under a \$300,000 grant provided by the General Assembly in June.

The study identified 190 offshore blocks outlined by the federal Mineral Management Service that have the wind resources to support power generation and the seabed geology to support wind turbines and are free of other restrictions such as military bombing ranges.

In August, the U.S. Interior Department said it will be at least a year before it is ready to consider permits for wind farms in federal waters.

UNC's Elfland said the planned demonstration turbines could be the first placed in U.S. offshore waters. Rhode Island is also proceeding with a pilot offshore commercial project, she said.

Various European countries have been operating offshore wind farms since the early 1990s.

The pilot project will help utility-scale wind energy development by enabling studies to optimize measuring and predicting the wind resource, quantifying ecological impacts and demonstrating turbine performance in tropical storm conditions, Duke Energy said.

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