

# What's Happening

I N T H E U S A ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 17, NO 7 MARCH 2010

## *A Decision on Cape Wind is Coming*

For nearly ten years a company has planned to build a wind farm to provide electricity off Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The project would be the first major offshore wind farm in the United States. However, getting the approval for it has been difficult. In February Ken Salazar, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, announced that he wants a decision on it soon.

The project is called Cape Wind. It would place 130 spinning turbines in the waters of Nantucket Sound. They would stretch 4–11 miles off the coast of Cape Cod and the nearby islands. The hub of each turbine would stand 285 feet in the air, and the turbine's long blades would reach as high as 440 feet.

The location is nearly ideal for a wind farm. The turbines would stand at Horseshoe Shoals, a smooth sandbar in shallow water without large waves. The average wind speed there is 19 miles per hour. Furthermore, the project would use its electricity efficiently. Sending it to nearby Cape Cod and the islands would reduce both costs and the loss of energy that come from sending the electricity a longer distance.

The U.S. wants to build sources of clean energy. Wind provides one of the alternatives to burning oil and natural gas. Cape Wind's energy could reduce the consumption of 113 million gallons of oil annually, and reduce the amount of carbon dioxide that goes into the atmosphere by a million tons. It would provide approximately 75 percent of the area's electricity.

Opposition to the project has come from a variety of groups. Local fishermen opposed it at first because they feared that they would lose Horseshoe Shoals as fishing grounds. They earn about 60 percent of their annual incomes from that area, and having to go to fishing grounds farther away would increase their costs. However, now they are satisfied that the turbines will not affect them.

Some residents in the area also object to the project. They want to preserve the area's natural beauty. One concern is a 10-story service platform. It would store 40,000 gallons of oil and 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel that could cause environmental problems if

they spilled into the water. It also would have a landing pad for helicopters. Residents do not want to hear the sound of either the turbines or helicopters.

People who support the project accuse many residents of taking a "NIMBY" attitude. The word comes from the first letters of "not in my back yard." This expression fits people who support something until it causes an inconvenience to them. In this case, some NIMBY environmentalists are saying that Cape Wind is the right project, but just in the wrong place. Supporters of the project maintain that seeing wind turbines miles away on the horizon is a small price to pay for the environmental benefits of clean, renewable energy.

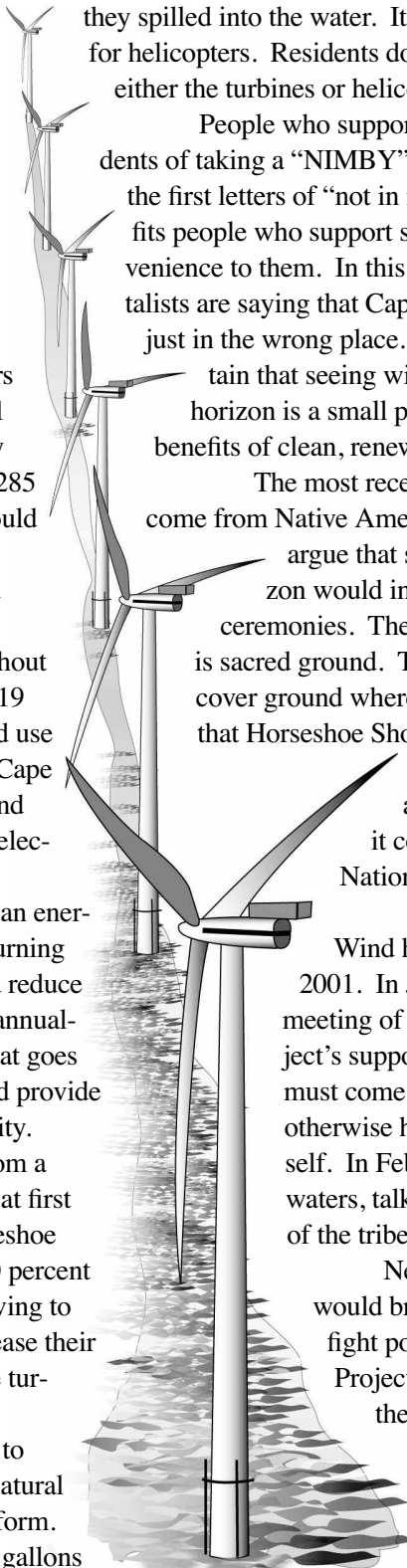
The most recent challenge to Cape Wind has come from Native Americans. Two tribes in the area argue that seeing wind turbines on the horizon would interfere with their sunrise greeting ceremonies. They also feel that Nantucket Sound is sacred ground. They say that the shallow waters cover ground where their ancestors once lived, and that Horseshoe Shoals may even be an historic burial site. The National Park Service agrees. It decided in January that it could include the site on the National Register of Historic Places.

The disagreements over Cape Wind have caused repeated delays since 2001. In January Ken Salazar called a meeting of Native Americans and the project's supporters. He told them that they must come to an agreement by March 1, otherwise he would make the decision himself. In February he took a trip through the waters, talked with people, and joined one of the tribes for a sunrise ceremony.

New sources of renewable energy would bring certain benefits. They would fight pollution and create new jobs.

Projects like Cape Wind could change the way the U.S. produces energy.

After many delays Mr. Salazar faces one final task. He must be certain that this new project will not damage historic lands that he has sworn to protect.



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The project is called Cape Wind. It would make electricity with 130 turbines in the waters of Nantucket Sound. They would stretch 4–11 miles off the coast of Cape Cod and the nearby islands. The top of the turbines' long blades would reach 440 feet in the air.

The location is nearly ideal for a wind farm. The turbines would stand in shallow water without large waves. The average wind speed there is 19 miles per hour. In addition, sending the electricity to nearby Cape Cod would reduce both costs and the loss of energy that come from sending it a longer distance.

The U.S. wants to build sources of clean energy. Wind is an alternative to burning oil and natural gas, so it reduces the amount of carbon dioxide that goes into the atmosphere. Cape Wind would provide 75 percent of the area's electricity.

There has been strong opposition to the project. Local fishermen opposed it at first because they feared that they would lose fishing grounds. If they had to go to fishing grounds farther away, that would increase their costs. However, now they are satisfied that the turbines will not affect them.

Some residents in the area also oppose the project. They want to protect the area's natural beauty. One concern is a tall service platform that would store 40,000 gallons of oil and 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel. That could lead to oil

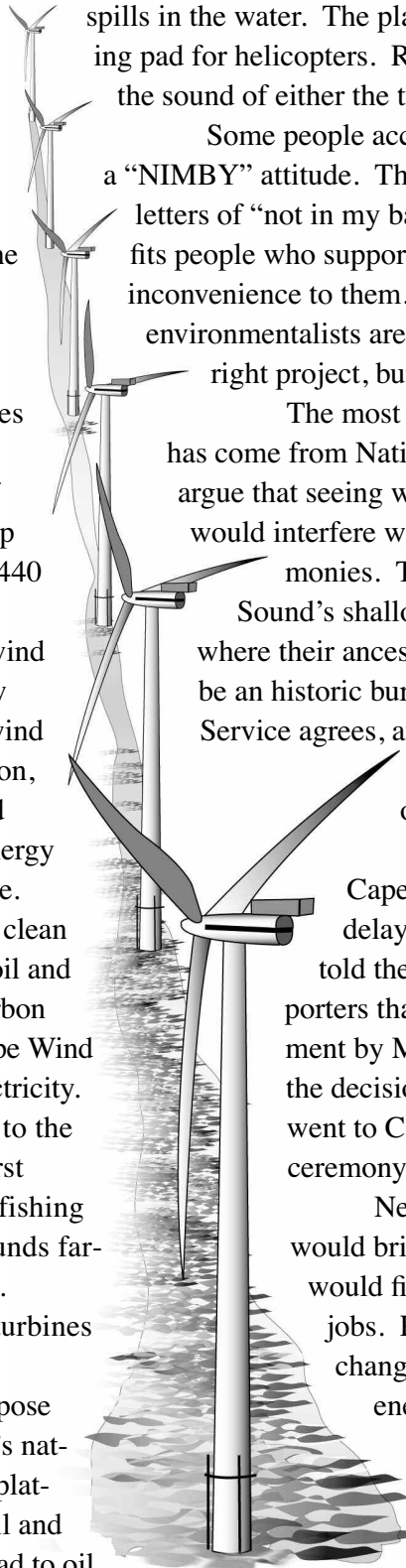
spills in the water. The platform also would have a landing pad for helicopters. Residents do not want to hear the sound of either the turbines or helicopters.

Some people accuse many residents of taking a "NIMBY" attitude. The word comes from the first letters of "not in my back yard." This expression fits people who support something until it causes an inconvenience to them. In this case, some NIMBY environmentalists are saying that Cape Wind is the right project, but just in the wrong place.

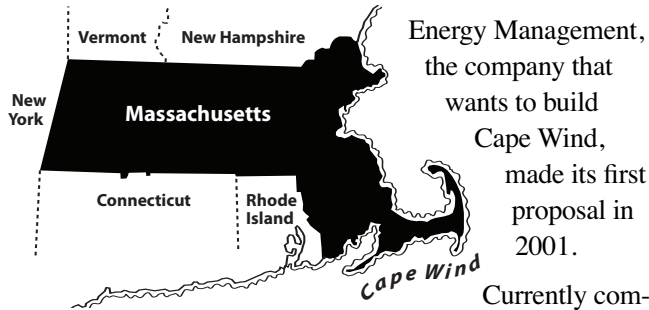
The most recent challenge to Cape Wind has come from Native Americans. Two tribes argue that seeing wind turbines on the horizon would interfere with their sunrise greeting ceremonies. They also feel that Nantucket Sound's shallow waters cover sacred ground where their ancestors once lived. It may even be an historic burial site. The National Park Service agrees, and says that it could put the site on the National Register of Historic Places.

The disagreements over Cape Wind have caused repeated delays since 2001. Ken Salazar has told the tribes and the project's supporters that they must come to an agreement by March 1. If not, he will make the decision himself. In February he went to Cape Cod and attended a sunrise ceremony.

New sources of renewable energy would bring certain benefits. They would fight pollution and create new jobs. Projects like Cape Wind could change the way the U.S. produces energy. However, Mr. Salazar also must be certain that this new project will not damage historic lands that he has sworn to protect.



# Background Information



panies are more willing to invest in land-based wind projects because they can win federal approval faster than offshore projects.

If Ken Salazar has to make the decision about Cape Wind, he expects to do it by April. Even if he approves it, there will be legal challenges to the project.

Construction of the wind farm will take 18 months.

Wind energy now provides only about two percent of the country's energy. Cape Wind would provide electricity for 420,000 homes.

Currently 45% of the Cape region's electricity comes from a power plant that burns bunker oil and natural gas. There have been two major oil spills in the area. The first spilled 7.7 million gallons of oil in December 1976, and the second spilled 98,000 gallons of oil in April 2003.

The U.S. Department of Energy reports that by 2024 wind turbines could provide 20 percent of the power in the Eastern electric grid.

The National Park Service's decision in January ruled that the 560-square mile Nantucket Sound is a site with significant traditional, cultural, historic and archaeological value. If it were on the National Register of Historic Places, it could restrict any commercial use of the Sound.

The two tribes that oppose the wind farm are the Mashpee Wampanoag and Aquinnah Wampanoag nations. Mr. Salazar's private sunrise meeting was with the Mashpee tribe on a beach on Cape Cod. After that he had a discussion with the Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe on Martha's Vineyard.

An archaeologist for the Interior Department accompanied Mr. Salazar to Cape Cod. He said that samples from the land under Nantucket Sound show that the site was above water 6,000 to 8,000 years ago.

There were other concerns about the wind farm. One came from the Humane Society, which argued that the turbine's blades could kill thousands of migrating birds every year. Another had to do with the turbines' proximity to the navigation channels for cargo ships and ferries. They could pose a danger of collision in heavy fog and storms.

## Topics for Discussion and Writing

### Pre-reading:

- Give some reasons why some people on Cape Cod might oppose having wind turbines in the waters there.

### Comprehension:

- Give details about Cape Wind's location, and describe the advantages of having a wind farm there.

### Beyond the Text:

- Do you think that Native American traditions should be allowed to get in the way of progress?
- Do you think that the people who live on Cape Cod have a right to beautiful views?
- What are other forms of alternative energy?

## Vocabulary (\*advanced article only)

*Article-specific:* wind farm; offshore; turbine; sound; hub\*; blade; sandbar\*; carbon dioxide; platform; burial; register

*High-use:* project; major; furthermore\*; efficiently\*; source; alternative; consumption\*; opposition; variety\*; annual\*; income\*; attitude; benefit; challenge; to swear

## Sources

*Washington Post* February 8, 5, 2010

*Boston Globe* February 3, 2010

*New York Times* January 14, 2010; January 16, 2009; December 16, 2005

U.S. Department of the Interior [www.doi.gov](http://www.doi.gov)

Cape Wind [www.capewind.org](http://www.capewind.org)

## CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

### English-Language Arts

*Reading* 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

*Writing* 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

### ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking

### Science

4.1; 5.4; 6.4; 6.6

Structure and Composition of the Atmosphere