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Environmentalists cheer DEP report on offshore wind

By Evelyn Lee

The state Department of Environmental Protection released a draft report Friday on the preliminary findings of a two-year research project examining the potential ecological impact offshore wind energy projects would have in the Garden State.

“This is a groundbreaking study,” said Dr. **Gary Buchanan**, manager of the DEP’s Office of Science, who presented the report at DEP headquarters Friday morning. “New Jersey is the first state to take such a detailed scientific look at its offshore ecological resources in the context of wind energy.”



Offshore wind farms would have a negligible impact on birds, fish and other sea life, according to the DEP’s report.

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According to the draft report, wind energy turbines, which could be located three to 20 miles off the New Jersey coast, would have negligible impacts upon bird, fish and marine mammal life. Moreover, the DEP has proposed mitigation procedures to limit negative impacts on birds and marine mammals, such as shutting down wind turbines for brief periods during peak bird migration seasons and noise-reduction techniques during construction to limit the strain on hearing-sensitive dolphins.

The \$7 million study, which included 75 miles of coastal area from Seaside Park to North Wildwood — as well as some 1,360 square nautical miles — examined the abundance, distribution and migratory patterns of birds, fish, marine mammals and sea turtles. It also took into account shipping lanes, pipelines, tug and barge transit routes, and undersea utility lanes, while also mapping artificial reefs, commercial and recreational fishing areas, and marine protected areas.

“We now have the science and data needed to take the first steps towards making wind energy projects a reality for New Jersey,” said DEP Commissioner **Bob Martin**. The study’s results can be used to help evaluate a pilot offshore wind project that Cape May-based **Fisherman’s Energy** has proposed building some three miles off the coast.

The state’s environmentalists largely applauded the study’s findings.

“This is an important step forward for wind in New Jersey,” said **Matt Elliott**, clean-energy advocate at Environment New Jersey.

“Without a doubt, the biggest threat to New Jersey’s avian and marine life is climate change,” he said. “And offshore wind is an important strategy to reduce global warming pollution.”

But while the report is “a big step,” said **Jeff Tittel**, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, “the state needs to move forward on permitting and funding for offshore wind.”

He said the report actually slowed the state’s progress in implementing wind power, since “the DEP spent two years on a blue-ribbon panel and another two years on a baseline study, which did not include an environmental review or risk assessment.”

Tittel urged the state to expedite such a review, as well as pass an offshore wind credit bill that was recently approved by the Senate Environment and Energy Committee.

“In order for New Jersey to adequately protect the environment, it needs to start building windmills and stop studying them,” he said.

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