

A mighty wind

Editorial

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It will be interesting to see if the residents in the mountains of Virginia have as good a NIMBY lobby as the rich folks up Massachusetts' Nantucket Sound.

The two locations couldn't be more different. Nantucket and Cape Cod are where the rich go to play - among them, the Kennedys with their family compound in Hyannis Port.

Highland County is in the western part of the commonwealth and is as rural as Virginia gets.

The common link between these two distinct locations is the prevailing winds and the prospect of wind farms.

There is a proposal to construct as many as 22 wind turbines in Highland County. It would be the first in the state, though there is a similar application for a wind farm on the Eastern Shore. The Highland wind farm would include giant, 400-foot windmills that can produce 39 megawatts of electricity.

Wind farms are prevalent in Europe and the concept of harnessing power from wind is popular with environmentalists because it provides an alternative to fossil fuels.

Of course, we said the "concept" of wind farms is popular among environmentalists. It's when these concepts become reality that objections are raised.

The battle against wind farms in Massachusetts involves a proposal for 130 wind turbines about six miles off the coast of Cape Cod. Two prominent residents fighting the wind farms are Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and retired newsman Walter Cronkite. Both support the concept of wind farms just as long as it's not in their back yard. They argue that these man-made devices ruin the natural beauty of Nantucket Sound - scenic beauty obviously reserved for their yachts, speed boats and Jet Skis.

Neither Cronkite nor Kennedy is speaking out against the Highland County proposal, which leads us to believe that the windmills are a safe distance from Hyannis Port.

Aside from the usual NIMBY complaints centering on the Highland County proposal, some environmentalists are against the wind farm because it encroaches on a scenic portion of the surrounding mountain vistas.

Among the other complaints being thrown around is the danger the giant windmills pose to migratory birds. What? Any bird dumb enough to fly into a 400-foot windmill deserves to be taken out of the gene pool.

Environmentalists preach to us constantly that we must find alternatives to fossil fuels that pollute our skies and streams. It's a shame that such alternatives pose the problem of "sight pollution." But one thing is certain - giant windmills are a prettier sight than giant smoke stacks.

It will be interesting to see if the Highland County Board of Supervisors approves a land use request by a developer to build the wind farm. Perhaps the debate will be a bit different since Highland is not a place where rich environmentalists spend the summer.

This story can be found at: http://www.dailyprogress.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=WPN%2FMGArticle%2FWPN_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1031777382042&path=!news!opinion

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