



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

March 10, 2015

*Like a circle in a spiral, like a wheel within a wheel
Never ending or beginning on an ever spinning reel
As the images unwind, like the circles that you find
In the windmills of your mind!*

~ Legrand/Bergman

Objectivity, Where Art Thou?

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) of the US Department of Interior recently displayed to eager audiences in Wilmington and in Carolina Shores (down in the corner of Brunswick County) its “Environmental Assessment (EA) supporting a potential lease sale for more than 300,000 acres of federal waters off the coast of North Carolina for wind energy development.”

The BOEM press release announcing the document and the public comment mechanism bubbled with enthusiasm for the project, speaking of “BOEM’s work to jumpstart development of offshore wind” Not the stuff of the deliberate, thoughtful process that a project with enormous potential consequences, some positive and some negative, deserves from our government.

Gentle readers, we are being led down a primrose path by this process. The “environmental assessment” presented for our review does not assess the wind energy projects at all—not the forests of 600-foot high windmills off our beaches, not cables across our beaches to shore facilities of unknown proportions, not the potential for kills of shore birds and migratory species, not the stupendous capital cost that makes offshore wind energy the most expensive form of energy generation at hand.

The environmental assessment covers only the site assessment activities: a single skinny meteorological tower, some buoys, a few survey vessels. But this skimpy, shallow, incomplete environmental assessment leads to issue of leases. Commitment. Commitment by the lessee, commitment by BOEM, commitment to a result that has not been defined, described, examined, or appreciated to any extent when the process begins. A commitment effectively binding on the people of North Carolina. The momentum the process acquires at this early stage will increase as money is spent and the project, whatever it is, becomes unstoppable. Oh, there will an environmental impact statement for the final plan, but at that late stage in the process, that’s just checking a procedural box.

The large national environmental groups, Oceana, Sierra Club, don’t care. They are in love with the concept. The windmills of their minds spin with delight. Audubon has been distressingly quiet, going along with the euphoria, reluctant to raise its voice in defense of our beloved birds.

However, the Brunswick beach communities and the County Commissioners are not so entranced. They ask what a horizon full of 600-foot towers will do to the ocean vistas on which their economies depend. They ask about cost. They ask about bird kills. So does NCDENR. So do we.

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