



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

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Government! Three fourths parasitic and the other fourth stupid fumbling.
~ Robert A. Heinlein, Stranger in a Strange Land

Just Say “No,” NOAA

Robert A. Heinlein leaves out an element we have encountered: arrogance. Last October 20 we denounced the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) of the US Department of Interior for moving ahead with its program for leases for windmill farms off the Brunswick County coast without regard to economics, environmental effects, or the wishes of our State and the affected communities. Most offensive was disregard of Secretary of Environmental Quality Donald van der Vaart’s request on behalf of our State to keep the windmills at least 24 nautical miles off shore. This distance would put the windmills out of sight and reduce substantially the kills of coastal birds.

Comes now NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency we have admired for its efforts to protect our coastal waters and the creatures that live therein. In December, NOAA released a “Final Rule” defining the critical habitat for the North Atlantic Right Whale, an endangered species. Unit 2 extends from Cape Canaveral in Florida up the coast to the Cape Fear. This is regarded as “critical” because it is a calving area, without which the species may not survive. And *mirabile dictu*, the redefined habitat takes in BOEM’s windmill farm lease areas at the Brunswick beaches completely and that at Bald Head partly.

This is what NOAA says about the development of offshore windmill farms there:

The numerous floating, fixed, and submerged structures, mooring lines, and transmission cables associated with large ocean energy facilities could result in adverse effects to the essential features of Unit 2 by limiting the availability of the essential features such that right whales are not able to select dynamic, optimal combinations of the features necessary for successful calving. At some point the cumulative impact of many mooring buoys/wind leases could impact "selectability" of feature combination to a point where it impacts the critical habitat.

From this point NOAA equivocates. It does not forbid outright the development of windmill farms but speaks of “consultation” with BOEM. As if BOEM would act reasonably. Which we have found they do not. NOAA’s discussion of consultation with BOEM does not have an optimistic tone.

Here’s what BOEM has done to ease this issue out of our sight. They are integrating the southeastern North Carolina wind energy areas into the leasing process for South Carolina. That process is already well underway, with meetings having been held and issues developed. Down there.

Dealing with citizens and local governments can be so inconvenient for the Federal mission.

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