



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

October 20, 2015

In a letter dated February 23, 2015, we requested that no lease sales be offered within 24 nautical miles off the North Carolina coastline.

~ Donald van der Vaart, North Carolina
Secretary of Environmental Quality

Tilting at Windmills

At its meeting on October 7, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) of the US Department of Interior presented its program for requesting bids for leases for windmill farms at three locations off the coast of North Carolina: Kitty Hawk, Bald Head Island, and Oak Island.

It is quite evident that BOEM is proceeding with its own agenda without regard to economics, environmental effects, or the wishes of our State and the affected communities. How so?

1. We have not seen any evidence of economic analysis by BOEM in this or previous proceedings for licensing offshore wind energy facilities. When we asked a representative of BOEM about that, he confirmed that they had not done any economic analysis and that they did not plan to. Yet Dominion Electric is backing away from a project in Virginia because of the stupendous cost.

2. The leases BOEM will award would cover the entire period of survey, construction, and operation of the windmills. But the “environmental assessment” they have conducted covers only the first part, the survey. It does not address the effects of construction and operation of the forests of 600-foot high windmills off our beaches, the cables across our beaches, the shore facilities of unknown proportions. Nor does it address the potential for kills of shore birds and migratory species.

3. Perhaps the most offensive piece of bureaucratic arrogance is the disregard of Secretary van der Vaart’s request on behalf of our State to keep the windmills at least 24 nautical miles off shore. This is important. It takes 24 nautical miles for the earth’s curvature to put all but the tips of the windmills below the horizon. That distance would also reduce substantially the kills of coastal birds.

BOEM honored Virginia’s request for a 24-mile distance from Virginia Beach. They also honored Kitty Hawk’s resolution for that distance. (How could BOEM not? Kitty Hawk is only a few miles from the Virginia site.) The National Park Service obtained a 33.7 nautical mile buffer for the Bodie Island lighthouse. But at Bald Head the windmills would be 15 miles out; Oak Island-10 miles.

At the most recent BOEM meeting, Secretary van der Vaart repeated his request on behalf of Cape Fear beaches, citing the billion dollars in economic activity generated by visitors to the region and a survey showing that 55% of potential vacationers would not rent if windmills were in sight.

Time to get the Governor involved, eh?

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