



THE WOODS HOLE RESEARCH CENTER

149 Woods Hole Road · Falmouth, MA 02540-1644 USA
Telephone 508.540.9900 · Fax: 508.540-9700 · www.wbrc.org

George M. Woodwell: Cape Wind vs. Brayton Point

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ARCTIC WARMING; prolonged droughts in Africa, North America and Asia; increased forest fires in the western United States; an extraordinary jump in the death rate in Europe during a very hot summer; severe storms in the Philippines that killed hundreds; and this summer's hurricane season, which devastated Florida: All tend to confirm that the world is edging toward an open-ended environmental crisis.

Despite the seriousness of such events, the headlines seem removed from daily life. The news is distant: Drought in Asia? How does the water supply in Asia mean anything to me? But climatic disruption doesn't just threaten polar bears, farming in Asia, or trees in a remote rainforest; it will have -- and is having -- significant effects on the habitability of the earth, right down to what's happening just outside our own windows.

The discussion surrounding the proposed wind farm on Horseshoe Shoal in Nantucket Sound is one example of the apparently distant, intangible issues of climatic disruption made personal. Our reliance on oil, coal and natural gas has made the United States the largest single national contributor to greenhouse-gas emissions. Although we represent only 5 percent of the world's population, we contribute 22 percent of the greenhouse gases emitted to the atmosphere annually as the result of human activity. Those statistics, striking as they are, may not capture attention until the effects of, or some element of the solution to, the climatic disruption come home to our own neighborhoods.

Cape Cod residents are galvanized by concern about the wind farm, engaged in a debate that will, in many ways, set a precedent in responding to these global issues of energy and climate on a local level, where they all originate. Because the question of whether and how to proceed with the wind farm has far-reaching implications in science and government, as an example of what we can and will do to remedy complex global environmental problems, an especially thoughtful, informed and progressive analysis is demanded. Among the several issues on the table, consider the following:

Yes, the wind-turbine development is a commercial venture, but no more so than other power plants usurping air, water and land in varying degrees, largely without compensation to the public. We are, moreover, bathed in the effluents of the Brayton Point plant, outside Fall River. The effluents include mercury, as well as oxides of sulfur and nitrogen. We are also treated to the effluents of similar plants far to the west, in the Ohio Valley and elsewhere. The wind farm would produce clean power that would displace the noxious by-products of fossil and nuclear power. It would also be cheaper, safe and everlasting.

Yes, there will be limited bird mortality with the construction of the machines, but all information supports the limited effects of the turbines, not only on birds, but also on marine life, which may benefit from the installation. Furthermore, the broader context of sweeping changes wrought by global climatic disruption reaffirms the desirability of this course of action. Such local measures now ultimately assist in the prevention of global-scale losses.

Yes, the wind farm would alter the appearance of Nantucket Sound, but given the changes consuming the world around us that we accept routinely, this intrusion seems minor. It is not a Glen Canyon Dam. This change offers the



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advantage of providing power equivalent to about 75 percent of the total energy used by Cape Cod. Wind farms in Europe often become a draw for tourists, and as host to a large vacation population each summer, we have an opportunity to lead by example: to show those who travel to our shores how we can shape a future of renewable energy and simultaneously reduce dependence on foreign sources of energy, while alleviating serious local pollution problems.

It is with these thoughts that the Woods Hole Research Center has endorsed the facts set forth in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement recently released by the Army Corps of Engineers, and encourages in every way continued progress toward sustainable energy, here at home and elsewhere throughout the nation.

George M. Woodwell, Ph.D., is director of the Woods Hole Research Center.