

NIMBYs everywhere

Even wind power can't be invisible

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LORD, MAKE ME chaste," St. Augustine prayed, "but not just yet." Modern environmentalists and eco-celebrities such as Robert F. Kennedy Jr. have a similar prayer: Lord, give us wind power — but just not here. Yes, they say, windmills are non-polluting and renewable and everything that's good — but put 'em somewhere else.

"Some places are too precious to ruin," intones the Web site of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, which was formed to stop the East Coast's first big wind farm, the 468-megawatt Cape Wind project. "Recent wind-power proposals to build turbines up and down the Eastern Seaboard prove there are alternative sites," the Alliance says.

The trouble is that all those alternative sites also have a choir of NIMBYs singing the "somewhere else" chorus. Indeed, one of the "alternative sites," off Long Island's Jones Beach, numbers among its foes the same Robert F. Kennedy Jr. who wants to move the Nantucket Sound project somewhere else. That's *two* somewhere-elses Kennedy wants us to find.

No energy source is completely benign, although stately blades drawing kilowatts from thin air come pretty close. There are no zero-impact sites, no locations without their local Kennedys. If the NIMBYs prevail, wind power is doomed. And that would be a tragedy.

The true value of Cape Wind and similar ventures goes much deeper than simply topping off the regional electric grid or pushing renewable energy's share of power generation across some token threshold. Projects such as Cape Wind hold out the hope of preserving the earth's atmosphere and climate by

eliminating the use of fossil fuels to generate electricity.

That is an enormous task, requiring more than a tiny handful of wind projects in marginal sites. To make a real dent in fossil-fuel use will require hundreds, if not thousands, of windmill farms across America, on land as well as offshore. All those alternative sites, then, must be developed in addition to — not instead of — Cape Wind, while we accelerate conservation and energy efficiency in other consuming sectors, such as transportation. And wind power on this scale is not going to be invisible.

The equation couldn't be more clear: Every unit of energy extracted from the wind translates directly into less combustion of coal, oil and gas. Conversely, every unit not produced because a wind project has been blocked means more carbon fuels burned, more carbon dioxide filling the earth's atmosphere, more ruinous climate change.

If anyone should understand the need to maximize the energy output from wind turbines, it is environmentalists — particularly those who live or summer on Cape Cod. In the coming decades, Cape beaches will be inundated and

Cape dunes and structures battered by rising sea levels and increasingly violent storms, wrought by global warming. And, sure as daylight, continued reliance on oil will not only contaminate the environment but also fuel the cycle of war and terrorism.

Yet somehow environmental groups and high-profile individuals such as Kennedy can't connect the dots. They decry the April breakup in Buzzards Bay of a barge carrying bunker oil to a Cape electricity-generating plant. The spill shut beaches and a prized shellfishing area. But they can't see that stopping Cape Wind will subject Buzzards Bay to such oil shipments for decades. Nor does it seem to matter to them that other precious — albeit less prosperous — places, from West Virginia mountaintops to Wyoming sandhills, are sacrificed daily to yield the very fuels that the wind farm would displace.

If obstructionists such as Kennedy and the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound have their way, wind power may never amount to more than a "niche" energy source. What is at present our most promising large-scale energy alternative — and certainly the most alluring — could be strangled in its cradle as the NIMBY precedent takes hold nationwide.

History's great movements have all been universal, not selective. Abolitionists fought to free all slaves, not some. Labor sought to organize all workers, not just the most skilled. Environmentalists from John Muir to Rachel Carson campaigned to save nature everywhere — not just in a few "unique" areas.

It remains to be seen whether latter-day environmentalism will rouse itself to protect the whole earth — or degenerate into a protection scheme for the pretty views of well-to-do landowners.

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