



October 3, 2018

Secretary Matthew Beaton
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Attn. MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

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RE: Vineyard Wind Connector Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Report, EEA # 15787

Dear Secretary Beaton:

The Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC), the Cape's leading nonprofit environmental advocacy and education organization, has reviewed the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Report (SDEIR) for the Vineyard Wind Connector and offers the following comments.

Restating APCC's written comments for the project's Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR), there is a critical need to replace our nation's dependence on fossil fuels with clean, renewable energy from a variety of technology sources. The modern advancements in deep water offshore wind technology have made it one of the most viable sources for large-scale green energy production. APCC commends the Commonwealth on its commitment to produce 1,600 MW of offshore wind energy within the next decade and encourages it to move forward on adopting even more aggressive goals for offshore energy development and production.

As a first major step toward that goal, Vineyard Wind is proposing to develop an offshore wind project capable of generating 800 MW of power. As described in the SDEIR, for the New England grid, Vineyard Wind is projected to reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by approximately 1,630,000 tons per year (tpy), which is described in the SDEIR as being the equivalent of removing 325,000 cars from the road. Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions are expected to be reduced by approximately 1,050 tpy. Sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions will be reduced by approximately 860 tpy. Over the 30-year lifespan of the project, Vineyard Wind is expected to offset 48,984,670 tons of CO₂, 31,385 tons of NO_x and 25,641 tons of SO₂. As expressed in our previous comment letters, APCC considers these projected carbon emissions reductions to be a significant benefit for the environment of Cape Cod, Massachusetts and New England.

APCC appreciates Vineyard Wind's responses in the SDEIR to the written comments we

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submitted for the DEIR. We believe these responses, and other additional information provided in the SDEIR, sufficiently addressed a number of the questions we posed in our review of the DEIR. However, some of our questions and concerns remain unresolved. These issue areas, as well as several new issue areas that emerged in the SDEIR, are discussed in these written comments.

While APCC is a strong advocate of large-scale renewable energy production and the development of offshore wind as a means to meet our state's and our nation's energy needs, we also believe that offshore wind, including this proposed Vineyard Wind project, must meet required environmental protection standards, work to avoid both offshore and onshore environmental impacts, and when necessary, properly and completely mitigate environmental impacts.

Ocean Management Plan

The SDEIR describes the marine surveys and analysis conducted by the applicant to show the project's compliance with the Ocean Management Plan and management standards for Special, Sensitive, or Unique Estuarine and Marine Life and Habitats. APCC looks for more information in the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) regarding ongoing discussions with the Office of Coastal Zone Management and other state agencies for confirmation on the project's compliance with the Ocean Management Plan.

Rare and Protected Species

Sufficient protections for state and federally listed rare species must be a prominent component of this project. The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has determined that four species of state-listed birds are found within the project's transmission corridor: least tern (*Sternula antillarum*), common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), and roseate tern (*Sterna dougallii*). In ensuring protection of tern species, potential impacts to the sand lance, a fish that is an important food source for terns, must also be considered with regard to benthic impacts.

APCC calls on the project applicant to continue to work with federal and state agencies to further reduce the potential for adverse impacts to whales—particularly the North Atlantic right whale—other marine mammal species and sea turtles. The applicant has stated that best management practices and mitigation will be used for offshore construction and installation activities “to meet or exceed the required standards of applicable statutes, regulations, and policies” to protect rare species. Additionally, the applicant has pledged \$3 million for the Whales and Wind Fund to help advance marine mammal protections as the offshore wind industry develops along the East Coast.

Discussions with NHESP and other state agencies on refining project planning to further guarantee the avoidance of impacts to rare species should continue. APCC anticipates additional details on such plans, including contingencies for protecting North Atlantic right whales that may range outside their core habitat area and within state jurisdictional waters, will be discussed further in the FEIR.

Offshore Cable Routes

APCC supports the development of a benthic monitoring plan, as described in the SDEIR, to document the disturbance to and recovery of marine habitat and benthic communities from construction and installation activities associated with the offshore components of the project in federal and state waters. This monitoring plan should be accompanied by a commitment to develop appropriate mitigation responses if deemed necessary to address unanticipated project-related impacts.

The SDEIR provides information on a revised Hydrodynamic and Sediment Dispersion Modeling Study to gauge the probable impacts from sediment dispersion and deposition caused by laying the offshore cable. Information from the study provided in the SDEIR suggests that impacts from sediment dispersion will be minor and temporary for both the New Hampshire Ave. route and the Covell's Beach route. The study also suggests that sediment deposition from proposed open trenching is not expected to exceed sensitivity thresholds for shellfish in Lewis Bay.

If this analysis is correct, APCC is satisfied that impacts from laying the offshore cable, and particularly impacts to shellfish in Lewis Bay, will be minimal and temporary.

However, in written comments on the DEIR, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) expressed continued concern about impacts to marine resources in Lewis Bay from the proposed trenching method. In its written comments, DMF states that the Covell's Beach alternative appears to have a lower impact to marine resources relative to the New Hampshire Ave. route and calls for further justification by the project applicant if it continues to identify New Hampshire Ave. as the preferred landfall route. APCC recommends clarification in the FEIR regarding whether DMF's concerns have been adequately addressed by the additional information provided in the SDEIR.

If the Lewis Bay route is selected, APCC encourages the applicant to continue discussions with state agencies, the town and shellfishermen on a mitigation plan that would include shellfish reseeded and other appropriate measures.

Nitrogen Resuspension in Lewis Bay

APCC's questions about resuspension of nitrogen in Lewis Bay in our comments submitted for the project's Environmental Notification Form (ENF) and the DEIR have not been adequately addressed. From APCC's June 6, 2018 comments on the DEIR:

"In APCC's comment letter on the ENF, we said that, 'Given that Lewis Bay has a TMDL for nitrogen, the DEIR should discuss measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate potential water quality impacts and impacts on aquatic species due to resuspension of sediments and remobilization of nitrogen during offshore trenching and horizontal direct drilling...' To reiterate our concern about nitrogen being released during resuspension of sediments, the Massachusetts Estuaries Project (MEP) study of Lewis Bay (2008) stated that the Lewis Bay embayment system is at risk of eutrophication (over enrichment) from enhanced nitrogen loads primarily from wastewater but also other sources.

Nitrogen enrichment is the primary cause of impairment of eelgrass, according to the MEP report.”

Although extensive study was conducted by the Vineyard Wind project applicant of the project’s impacts on sediments and the likely suspended sediment plumes associated with cable burial, the analysis does not address the potential resuspension of nitrogen into the water column and the effects it would have on nutrient loading in Lewis Bay. The SDEIR states that sediment suspension is expected to be temporary, but APCC’s concern centers on the resuspension and remobilization of nitrogen in the water column and its potential impact on water quality in the bay. The release of nitrogen from suspended sediments and its function as a nutrient that facilitates the growth of algae may or may not have longer-term impacts associated with this project, but given the nutrient-related water quality problems currently existing in Lewis Bay, APCC believes this issue should be looked at and specifically addressed. We could find no information about this in the SDEIR.

Landing Sites

In the DEIR, APCC recommended that the applicant compare and discuss the benefits and detriments of the two proposed landing sites—New Hampshire Ave. in Yarmouth via Lewis Bay and Covell’s Beach in Barnstable. The SDEIR includes that comparison. In the SDEIR’s discussion of the two sites, which includes an analysis of potential impacts, the applicant continues to state a preference for the New Hampshire Ave. site, largely based on easier accessibility, cost and fewer disruptions to residential areas along the land cable route during installation. But, the applicant continues to view both sites as feasible. The applicant also continues to indicate a strong preference for using open trenching to lay the offshore cable in Lewis Bay versus horizontal directional drilling (HDD) based on efficiency and cost. APCC suggests that the applicant make a determination in the FEIR for which method will be used if the New Hampshire Ave. route is chosen.

According to information provided in the SDEIR, it appears environmental impacts from both landing sites, although slightly different at each location, would be minimal and temporary. Based on the analysis made available by the applicant in the DEIR and SDEIR, APCC continues to believe that both landing sites and proposed land routes to the substation site are viable—if accompanied by proper mitigation.

Onshore Cable Routes

In response to APCC’s comments in the DEIR, the applicant confirmed that the preferred New Hampshire Ave. land route would use existing roadways and/or existing utility rights-of-way (ROW) and would avoid Article 97 lands and lands under conservation restriction. The applicant has also revised the Covell’s Beach preferred landward route in the SDEIR. With this change, the preferred Covell’s Beach onshore route to the substation site will be entirely within existing roadway layouts, including the Covell’s Beach parking lot. It will not require disturbing any ROW or Article 97 lands, and therefore has advantages from that perspective over the previous Covell’s Beach route as well as having advantages over variants of the route being considered for the New Hampshire Ave. landing site that would utilize ROW and Article 97 lands. APCC

welcomes this change in the routing, which avoids disturbance of vegetated areas in the ROW and reduces environmental impacts.

Ultimately, APCC encourages a final decision on the landing site and landward routing to be based on assessing and weighing the overall environmental impacts and choosing the route with the least impact.

In Attachment H (Revised Engineering Plans for New Hampshire Avenue Route) in the SDEIR, Sheet 12 (Proposed Duct Bank Layout) shows proposed equipment staging areas #3 and #4 as being "on town owned land" near Spyglass Hill Road. These delineated staging areas appear to be significantly wide and long and would require significant clearing. APCC seeks clarification on the current designated land use for these parcels—are they general municipal use, open space, or possessing a specified land use restriction? If clearing is required, particularly tree clearing, what mitigation is proposed by the applicant?

Substation

The site of the proposed substation is within the Zone II for public water supply. It is therefore critical that groundwater resources be guaranteed protection from the potential for hazardous materials spills or from contaminants in stormwater runoff.

The SDEIR provides additional information about the construction of containment structures for equipment that will contain oil at the substation. The applicant proposes to place transformers and other equipment within containment structures designed to contain 110% of the oil volume of the equipment, plus an additional nine inches of storage to account for a potential 100-year 24-hour storm event. The containment system will be fitted with a spill alarm network. Vineyard Wind states that it is also looking into the possibility of transformers and other major electrical equipment that can use a biodegradable dielectric fluid.

The applicant has affirmed that it will include a spill response plan as part of the project's safety management system. The SDEIR states that a final spill prevention and containment plan for the substation site has not been developed, but a "conceptual design basis has been established and an operational phase plan will be formulated during permitting."

Since spill prevention and containment is the most important environmental aspect of the land-based portion of this project, APCC believes it is in the public interest for the applicant to provide a largely complete plan for protecting public water resources in the FEIR so that the public has the opportunity to review the plan and comment. Additionally, APCC looks for more information on transformer selection in the FEIR that would help satisfy concerns about potential impacts to groundwater. We are also mindful that this project will be subject to review by the Cape Cod Commission and must satisfy regional standards for storage and use of hazardous materials within Zone II Wellhead Protection Areas.

The proposed stormwater plan for the substation, which includes best management practices and some low impact development measures, appears on its surface to be adequate in treating

and releasing stormwater onsite. However, the SDEIR discusses the proposed inclusion of multiple oil absorbing inhibition devices that will be utilized to capture dielectric fluid that may be released from the oil containment structures. APCC would like confirmation on whether these devices are designed to capture 100 percent of oil in stormwater. If not, what percent of oil in stormwater going through the oil absorbing inhibition devices can be expected to pass through with the recharged stormwater? APCC looks to future review of the project, including review through the Cape Cod Commission regulatory review process, for final determinations on the effectiveness of the project's stormwater plan and its ability to comply with MassDEP Stormwater Standards and regional water protection standards.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Andrew Gottlieb
Executive Director



Don Keeran
Assistant Director