

# Report shows mid-Atlantic has high potential for wind energy

April 6 2009, By Bruce Henderson

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The breezes blowing across the shallow waters of the mid-Atlantic coast, including North Carolina, hold some of the nation's highest potential for harvesting wind energy, a new federal report says.

[Wind](#) over waters less than 100 feet deep could supply at least 20 percent of the electricity needs of most coastal states, the Interior Department report says. Erecting [wind turbines](#) in shallow water would be cheaper and easier than in deep water.

But allowing North Carolina's first commercial-scale wind turbines won't be a quick or easy decision.

That's a point Gov. Bev Perdue has continued to reinforce. She is slated to speak today at the Charlotte Energy Summit, an invitation-only conference about growing the region's energy industry sponsored by the Charlotte Chamber, Duke Energy and the Charlotte Regional Partnership. Many people won't like the look of turbines 300 feet tall, especially along the scenic coast. Birds and bats could strike the spinning blades. Residents will demand noise studies.

State legislators and some coastal counties are preparing standards for where to allow [wind farms](#). The state's sounds, inside the Outer Banks, could be likely targets.

"We don't have a proposal yet, but in all the presentations I've seen, the (potential) facilities seem to be in shallow water," said Mike Lopazanski

of the N.C. Division of Coastal Management.

The federal government has jurisdiction over waters more than 3 miles offshore. N.C. House and Senate bills introduced last month laid out rules for commercial wind farms inside that boundary.

The measures place 20 coastal counties under the control of the Coastal Resources Commission. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources would oversee the rest of the state.

At least two coastal counties have adopted their own standards for where to allow turbines.

Currituck, in the state's far northeastern corner, adopted an ordinance last year that planning director Ben Woody considers wind farm-friendly.

"We've had interest," Woody said. "A lot of landowners in this county have been approached by wind-energy developers."

But as a practical matter, he said, the county's topography will limit the possibilities.

Legally protected wetlands cover about half of the area. And the county is especially protective of Currituck Sound, long famous for the waterfowl hunting that is still a vital source of income.

Farther out, the federal waters from North Carolina to Delaware hold 71 percent of the nation's shallow-water wind resources, the Interior report says.

It's unclear whether leasing for wind projects there will begin before 2015, according to the report. But it named North Carolina, Virginia and

Maryland as areas of interest.

As the Obama administration directs new attention to renewable energy sources such as the wind, it's also mulling offshore oil and gas exploration.

Last week's report includes a proposal to sell three leases in the mid-Atlantic between 2010 and 2015. The report proposed one oil and gas lease off the southern Atlantic coast from South Carolina to mid-Florida.

The areas are the same as those proposed by the Bush administration in January.

Only one sale has a specific location, an area 50 miles off Virginia, just above the N.C. line. Five companies have expressed interest.

Public support for drilling and the sensitivity of the environment will factor into whether the proposals go forward.

Sixty percent of public comments received in recent months support expanded oil and gas exploration, the Interior report said, with support running as high as 86 percent in South Carolina and Georgia.

Perdue hasn't changed her position, said spokeswoman Chrissy Pearson.

"Anything off North Carolina should be looked at carefully by a team of scientists to make sure North Carolina's interests are protected," she said.

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