

Wind power: Obama's promises just hot air so far

September 9 2009, By Jim Tankersley and Christi Parsons

President Barack Obama is still at least a year away from seeing wind turbines take root anywhere off the U.S. coast, even though his administration has promised to make offshore wind a priority, and even though developers are lining up to string wind farms up and down the Atlantic seaboard.

The administration, delayed by controversy and red tape, has made "[clean energy](#)" one of its top policy pushes but has yet to grant a single permit for wind or solar development on public land, onshore or off. Administration officials say the first solar permits won't come until at least next year, and that the first offshore wind farm is also likely a year or two away.

Officials say they've moved quickly to clear the "regulatory underbrush" untended by a Bush team that made little effort to develop wind and solar energy on public land, and that their efforts have sparked a "flurry of activity" among developers.

"We're cooking, and we're excited about it," said David Hayes, the deputy interior secretary. "We are going to see this commercial development occurring, both offshore and solar."

The project proposed for Nantucket Sound, where the president vacationed last month, is a case in point.

For more than eight years, investors on all sides -- some with interests in

the new sources of energy, and others making money off the old ones -- have been fighting to either navigate or gum up the permit process of the proposed Cape Wind Project.

The project would provide the majority of the power on Cape Cod and nearby islands, designers say, harnessing wind offshore and transmitting it via cables under the sea back to land.

The windmills would be visible from the mainland as well as Martha's Vineyard on a clear day, an idea that warms the heart of people like Barbara Hill, a Cape resident and head of nonprofit Clean Power Now.

"They'll be like masts on the horizon," she says. "It's this perfect relationship between technology and nature."

Critics fear the impact on the environment, boaters and on fishermen who make their living on the shoal where the turbines would be constructed. American Indian tribes on the sound, who call themselves "People of the First Light," say the mills would obstruct their view of the sunrise.

"It would interfere with the natural beauty, the essence of why people come here," says Audra Parker of rival nonprofit Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound. "They don't come for an industrial landscape. They come to get away from that."

Republicans are prodding the administration to move faster on every domestic energy front. They chided Obama on an offshore-wind-themed mock postcard they released before the president's Martha's Vineyard vacation. "Don't let this energy opportunity breeze by you!" they wrote.

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