

Navy: Wind farm opposed by GOP lawmakers won't harm radar

January 20 2017, by Michael Biesecker

The Pentagon says it disagrees with Republicans in North Carolina who claim a \$400 million clean energy project slated to power data centers for Amazon.com Inc. poses a threat to national security.

State legislative leaders have asked the incoming Trump administration to either kill or require major changes to the nearly completed wind farm, which they said will interfere with the operation of a military radar installation that scans for aircraft and ships hundreds of miles out over the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean.

Rep. Walter Jones, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, also wrote to Trump's choice to lead the Homeland Security Department last month to raise concerns about the project. The sprawling 20,000-acre facility in the congressman's district includes 104 spinning wind turbines, each nearly as tall as a 50-story building.

The Navy told The Associated Press this week it had extensively studied the potential for interference with its Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar, or ROHTR, system just across the state line in Chesapeake, Virginia.

"The Navy is committed to working with developers to ensure that renewable energy projects are compatible with our mission and operations," said Lt. Chika Onyekanne, a Navy spokesman. "While initial studies indicated a potential conflict between the Amazon [wind project](#) and the ROTHTR, additional data collected since that time

determined that the project is not likely to affect the mission."

President-elect Donald Trump has long expressed opposition to wind turbines, tweeting about them more than 60 times over the years. Trump has battled the construction of an offshore wind project he says mars the view from his golf resort in Scotland. At a campaign rally in August, he criticized both solar panels and wind turbines, which he said pose a lethal threat to wildlife.

"The wind kills all your birds. All your birds, killed. You know, the environmentalists never talk about that," said Trump, who has pledged to bring back tens of thousands of coal mining jobs lost as utilities switch to cleaner ways to produce electricity.

Trump also has a beef with Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos, who owns The Washington Post. Trump has been highly critical of the Post's coverage of his campaign, which included revealing a 2005 videotape in which Trump made disparaging remarks about women.

Representatives of the Trump transition team did not immediately respond Thursday to an email seeking comment.

The project is being constructed by Avangrid Renewables, a U.S. subsidiary of Spanish clean-energy giant Iberdrola S.A. Amazon has contracted to buy the full electrical output from the turbines, comparable to the power about 60,000 homes use in a year, to run its Virginia data centers.

Avangrid spokesman Paul Copleman said Thursday the project is expected to come online by the end of the month.

A 2014 agreement between Avangrid and the Navy said there is potential for conflict between the wind farm and operation of the radar array, but

that the Pentagon also seeks to enhance the country's renewable energy resources. The agreement specified placement of the [wind turbines](#) and includes language that that the company would curtail operations "for a national security or defense purpose."

In their letter to Trump DHS nominee John Kelly, North Carolina lawmakers claimed last month that the Pentagon dropped opposition to the wind farm because of the "political correctness" of outgoing President Barack Obama's administration. Kelly, a retired Marine general, raised concerns about the placement of the wind farm in 2014, while serving as the head of U.S. Southern Command.

"In our opinion, due to the consequences at stake, this wind project should never have been permitted to be built," says the letter signed by House Speaker Tim Moore, Senate Leader Phil Berger and eight others.

In asking that the wind project be permanently scraped, the Republicans also noted that the company that would be most harmed is foreign owned.

"No tears need to be shed for Iberdrola, which is the antithesis of the Make America Great again program," they wrote.

Asked for response Thursday to the Navy's statement, state Sen. Bill Cook said the group stood by their opposition to the project.

"The fact is that no one, anywhere has had to deal with this type of interference on a ROTHF," said Cook, whose district includes the wind farm. "It's good that the Navy is optimistic, but it is speculative."

According to his campaign webpage, Cook is a retired executive of Potomac Electric Power Co., a Washington-based utility heavily reliant on coal and natural gas.

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