

Opponents of NJ offshore wind project worry turbines will affect views, fishing, and tourism

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A half-dozen people stood on an oceanfront deck with a million-dollar view, asking a hundred questions about what's on the horizon. On this

clear, winter afternoon, it was the Atlantic as far as the eye can see.

By 2024, nearly 100 of the world's largest, most powerful [wind](#) turbines could be spinning 15 miles off the coast. With blades attached, the windmills could reach as high and wide as 850 feet, and simulations created by Orsted, the Danish-based power company behind the Ocean Wind project, show the turbines are visible, faintly, from beaches in Brigantine, Avalon, Stone Harbor, and Joe and Tricia Conte's deck in Ocean City.

"Some of those pictures are deceptive, though, because they were taken on a cloudy day," Joe Conte said. "The pictures they have of a clear day give you a much more vivid view of what it's really going to look like."

The project will power a half-million homes in New Jersey and, according to Orsted, create thousands of jobs, both offshore and on during the initial construction process, which could begin this year. It has the support of both Gov. Phil Murphy, who has actively pushed for alternative energy in the state, and President Joe Biden.

Murphy's office did not return a request for comment for this story, but Jeff Tittel, director of the Sierra Club's New Jersey chapter, said there was talk of offshore oil wells under past administrations.

"The alternative is more pollution," Tittel said.

But a campaign called Go Green and Unseen created by the Conte family raises concerns about the wind farm and its impact on tourism. The campaign's website advocates not against wind energy, but the turbines' location. Instead of 15 miles from the coast, the website advocates for 35 miles away, where they would likely not be seen at all.

"The wind farm will be **VERY VISIBLE** and create significant visual

pollution!" they wrote on the website. "This wind farm is going to set the precedence for all NJ offshore [wind farms](#). Basically, visual pollution could be coming to a NJ beach near you."

One woman visiting the Contes' home who asked not to be identified said the sight of offshore wind turbines would harm more than the view for people on the beach, one of the last places people aren't reminded of the world's industrialization.

"They will not be able to look out on the horizon and dream," the woman said of beach-goers.

Science says the human eye can generally see three miles out to sea, but various factors can increase or decrease that range. The height of the observer impacts sight line, along with the weather, and even the curvature of the Earth. Summer haze and evaporation from the ocean will limit views of the turbines.

Many on the Contes' deck pointed out that Ocean Casino, Atlantic City's tallest structure at 718 feet, was clearly visible on this Saturday. That building was 16 miles up the coast, as the crow flies.

"And you're looking at one structure right there, not hundreds," said Gregory Cudnik, a charter boat captain out of Long Beach Island

Gabriel Martinez, an Orsted spokesperson, said the company voluntarily agreed to move the wind farm from 10 to 15 miles off the coast. The company is confined to an area of 108 acres it was leased by the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and is also limited by offshore, commercial fishing interests, particularly New Jersey's substantial scallop business.

"At this distance, only on the clearest of days the turbines will be only

faintly visible on the horizon," Martinez said in an email.

A University of Rhode Island study found that Orsted's Block Island Wind Farm, which was completed in 2016, actually increased tourism. That study looked at AirBnb rental data and noted that "it's one thing to look at a turbine for a few days and be mesmerized by it. But to have it there constantly may be different."

Tricia Conte pointed out that Orsted's Block Island project consists of five turbines.

"We're talking about an industrial park here," she said.

A Facebook group started by the Contes under the same "go green and unseen" banner, now with about 1,000 members, has a slightly different mission. Called "Save our shorelines-Stop the wind farms off the coast of NJ!," the group's concerns have extended beyond Ocean City and questions another offshore wind project called Atlantic Shores that will be built farther north, between Atlantic City and Barnegat Light sometime in the 2020s.

Their concerns over the turbines are more pressing than the view, ranging from the turbines' effects on commercial and [recreational fishing](#), whether blades will interfere with migratory bird patterns, and where and how the project will run its power lines to inland transfer stations.

"It warrants, at the least, spending more time looking over all these concerns," said fisherman Tony Butch of Evesham.

Suzanne Hornick, the chairperson of Ocean City NJ Flooding Committee and a lifelong resident, brought to the Contes' home a four-page letter of concerns, which included electromagnetic fields caused by

the turbines and their potential effect on marine life.

"I'm a product of the '60s," Hornick said. "I firmly believe we can change this if we all band together."

Orsted, according to its Ocean Wind website, has promised to "ensure any [electric and magnetic field] emissions are below required thresholds and avoid any impacts, onshore and offshore." The company says power will be transferred to land via buried submarine cables that are tunneled below the beach using a process called horizontal directional drilling that "avoids impacts to sensitive coastal habitats."

Ocean City Councilman Bob Barr said he shares many of the concerns the Facebook group has raised, including any effect the turbines could have on tourism.

"We have a lot of questions," Barr said. "What does this do to the carbon footprint? What will it do to the birds? What is the lighting like at night? We have an airport nearby."

Recreational anglers are welcome to fish inside the wind farm and there has been talk of sightseeing tours taking daily trips there, too, much like at the Hoover Dam.

"I think it might actually increase tourism," Tittel said. "This, overall, is a really good thing for New Jersey."

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