

## Controversy on the Cape

*By Meghan Houlihan*

When Cape Wind Associates proposed building a 170-turbine wind farm in Nantucket Sound, controversy over the project dominated the local press. Today the debate shows little sign of cooling off. Opponents, such as the highly organized Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, argue that the project will hurt tourism and the local economy, while proponents, such as Cape Wind Associates, herald wind farms as tourist attractions. Opponents argue that endangered bird populations will be at risk, while proponents claim that wind turbines are safer for birds than other sources of energy production. Opponents show photographs portraying the virtual wind turbines as looming mechanical behemoths, while proponents counter with photographs depicting turbines that are barely visible.

The controversy seems limitless and runs the gamut from aesthetics to tourism to economics to ship and aircraft navigation to marine and avian welfare. And if there is anything the opponents and proponents would agree on, it's that such differences of opinion are not likely to be overcome.

With hype and hyperbole dominating the debate, it is difficult for those who are undecided to know who to believe and who to turn to for information. It was with this concern in mind that the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC) launched a public outreach initiative to try to identify and produce the information necessary for individuals to make informed decisions. One core piece of this effort was to hold a series of stakeholder meetings on the Cape in order to create an issue-oriented process to crystallize and explore areas of concern.

Assuming the role of "honest broker," MTC brought together regulators, citizens, and non-governmental organizations. Rather than offer space for interested parties to assert their positions, the meetings focused on identifying what is known about the Cape Wind project, what additional information is needed, and what will remain inherently uncertain while the proposed project is evaluated. For example, one meeting was devoted to understanding existing conditions such as the status of the natural system of Nantucket Sound and the electric utility industry in Massachusetts. Subsequent meetings focused on topics such as offshore wind technologies and economics, the use of visual modeling in creating simulations, and alternate sites for the project.

Although the meetings have not brought proponents and opponents closer to agreement, they have encouraged interaction among the parties in a respectful and well-managed environment, and they have helped citizens move beyond the heated rhetoric and examine the project objectively and comprehensively. Though the fate of the Cape Wind project is uncertain, efforts such as MTC's will help ensure citizens will be well-informed citizens.

A Cape and Islands Offshore Wind Public Outreach Initiative Progress Report was produced by the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative in December 2002 and is available at [www.masstech.org](http://www.masstech.org).

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