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Sports – 11A

Brunswick County coast

Wind power advocates pitch their case to the public

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

A nonprofit coalition that supports offshore wind energy set up multiple displays last Friday intended to show what turbines might look like from Oak Island, Bald Head Island and Holden Beach.

The most common question from attendees was along the lines of, "So, where are they?"

'Once in a generation opportunity'

Created by the British firm UNASYS, the images were designed to represent what 122 turbines would look like starting 17 nautical miles offshore. Nearly all viewers had to squint and move close to the 11-by-17-inch images to see anything other than the ocean and sky.

"This is great if this is what it really is," said Bald Head Island Mayor Peter Quinn. "I feel better."

"I don't think, personally, that it would affect our tourism," said Caswell Beach Town Commissioner Dan O'Neill. "It was very educational ... I would be glad to hear the other side."

Oak Island Town Council member Bill Craft said he had questions about wind energy but not whether the turbines would present an offensive view, assuming the depictions were

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Look closely. Can you see the wind turbines offshore? Neither can we. This image from wind energy advocates proclaims this is the view beachgoers would see with the turbines well offshore. Turbines would be nearly invisible, but other questions linger. (Photo contributed)

Turbines: wind energy advocates make pitch

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accurate.

"What I saw was six pictures with the ocean and a beautiful blue sky and nothing else," Craft said. As for wind energy in general, "I still don't have an opinion," he said.

"We tried to show what they would look like on a typical summer day," said Katherine Kollins, president of the Southeastern Wind Coalition. The images assume the turbines are 524 feet tall at the center of the blade housing, called a nacelle.

Jaime Simmons, program manager for the coalition, said modern turbines are designed to withstand a direct hit from a category 4 hurricane. Turbine construction in the Wilmington East area could also involve improvements to the ports at Wilmington and Morehead City, she said.

"This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that North Carolina is poised to capture," said Simmons.

Appearance only one concern

The appearance of the turbines is only one concern shared by local residents. Veteran charter fishing captain John Doshier said he wondered whether the generators and electric transmission cables could affect fish and fish migration patterns.

"Is it going to be a fish magnet or a fish deterrent?" asked fishing captain Cane Faircloth, leader of the Lockwood Inlet Association. He said anglers have a lot of questions and also wonder whether the turbines might lead to increased energy prices.

The first offshore turbines in the United States went into service in 2016 in the Northeast. They are as close as three miles from the shore. A 2019 study by the University of Rhode Island found tourism occupancy rates increased 19-percent percent in the peak of summer after the wind farm - called Block Island - began operations.

On January 27, the board of directors for the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution supporting contin-



ued exploration of the plan for offshore wind leases, tentatively scheduled to start in May.

The Southeastern Wind Coalition's study stated that when operating, wind turbines in North Carolina have the potential to create 723 full-time, permanent jobs and generate \$4.5-billion in annual revenue.

According to federal officials with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, the 127,865-acre lease area off the Brunswick County coast has the potential to generate 1.5-gigawatts of electricity, enough to power more than 500,000 homes.

The coalition noted that wind energy is most reliable in winter mornings and summer afternoons, when the demand for electricity is typically the highest.