DEP Considers 80 Offshore Windmills

By JACK FICHTER

STONE HARBOR MANOR — The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is taking proposals for a two-year study to be undertaken to place windmills as far as 20-miles offshore to generate electricity in a 72-mile stretch of coast from Stone Harbor to Seaside Heights.

Paul Gallagher, vice president of Atlantic County Utility Authority (ACUA), known for its five wind turbines visible from the Atlantic City Expressway, which provide power to a wastewater treatment plant, spoke to the Cape May Conservation Committee of the Sierra Club of New Jersey Monday at the Wetlands Institute here.

He said he believed Gov. Jon Corzine was in favor of constructing offshore windmills.

The proposal is for 80, 3.6-megawatt wind turbines, which could be built 12 to 13 miles offshore.

Gallagher said DEP first wants a study on the effect of offshore windmills on fish, marine mammals, turtles and birds.

PAUL GALLAGHER

energy costs to run the wastewater plant were increasing 10 to 15 percent per year.

Gallagher said the wastewater plant is one big pump that uses an "enormous amount of electricity, between 1.2 million kilowatts and 1.8 million kilowatts a month, as much power as the City of Northfield uses in 30 days.

Gallagher said one factor that makes electricity expensive is paying to have it "shipped" to your location, which amounted to 3.5 cents per kilowatt for the ACUA plant. The windmills producing power on site have eliminated that.

Gallagher said he knew he could not go to the "powers that be" and ask for $13 million in public money to build five windmills at ACUA. He found a private partner, Community Energy, of Bryn Mawr, Pa.

The ACUA leased five "pads" of land for $3,000 to Community Energy, which built the five windmills. ACUA entered a purchase agreement with Community Energy to buy all the electricity it could use.

Gallagher said the plant uses 50 percent of the power when all windmills are operating at 100 percent capacity. Community Energy sells the other 50 percent to the power company grid.

ACUA has a fixed power cost for the next 20 years of 8 cents per kilowatt. In its first year of operation, ACUA received 67 percent of its power needs from the windmills.

Gallagher said the windmills paid for themselves "the first minute they were running since we have zero invested in this."

Gallagher said it receives less power in July and August from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. because there is little wind. January, on the other hand, is "off the charts."

If wind exceeds 45 mph, the windmills are shut down to protect the machinery from stripped gears. The windmills resume working when the wind falls to 40 mph or lower, he said.

The windmills sit upon 28 pilings that are 95-feet deep which are backfilled with concrete, said Gallagher. Each windmill was assembled in one day.

The windmills have been operating since January 2006.

Contact Fichter at (609) 886-8600 Ext 30 or at: jfichter@cmcherald.com

turtles, and birds.

An question that has often been raised: Would windmills be visible from the beach?

He said it would be very difficult to hide the windmills, and is unnecessary because they are "pretty."

The ACUA windmills are visible from Somers Point, which is 9.5 miles away from their site. Gallagher said they are visible from the Margate causeway at five miles away.

"If you're at exit 21 on the parkway, going north on a perfect day, you can still see them and there,

Gallagher said DEP first wants a study on the effect of offshore windmills on fish, marine mammals, turtles, and birds.

An question that has often been raised: Would windmills be visible from the beach?

He said it would be very difficult to hide the windmills, and is unnecessary because they are "pretty."

The ACUA windmills are visible from Somers Point, which is 9.5 miles away from their site. Gallagher said they are visible from the Margate causeway at five miles away.

"If you're at exit 21 on the parkway, going north on a perfect day, you can still see them and there, you are 14 miles away," he said.

Offshore, the windmills would be sitting in 45 feet of water, said Gallagher.

Each ACUA windmill is 380 feet tall and can produce 1.6 megawatts of power.

Another objection to windmills has been the possibility of killing birds that hit the turbine blades. The projection for the ACUA windmills was the death of two birds per turbine per year.

He said the Caesar's casino parking garage killed

24 songbirds last year. Gallagher said the U.S. Coast Guard base in Cape May could be an ideal location for land-based windmills.

When he became vice president of ACUA, the utility was faced with rising labor and health benefit costs and more importantly,