

June 23, 2011

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< Great Lakes May Beat Atlantic To Offshore Wind

[Transcript](#)

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June 21, 2011 ROBERT SIEGEL, host:

States along the Atlantic Coast are racing to be first in the country to put wind turbines offshore, but a group in Ohio says the country's first offshore wind farm most likely won't be in the Atlantic but in the fresh waters of Lake Erie, about seven miles off the Cleveland coast.

Jeff St. Clair of member station WKSU has that story.

(Soundbite of motor boat)

JEFF ST. CLAIR: A dull gray salvage boat chugs out of the Port of Cleveland on a calm spring morning. It's part of the early stages of what some hope will become a major industry in Ohio. But today, the prospects of dozens of massive wind turbines sprouting from the lake floor seems remote, as we head for the only structure there now - an orange dot on the horizon.

The dot grows to a 100-foot wide structure, jutting 30 feet out of the water, as the boat pulls up to the century-old ironclad water intake crib. The helmeted diver, tethered to the boat by a coil of hoses, sinks into the murky water. His job is to recover an ice sensor sitting 50 feet down on the lake bottom.

Meanwhile, three engineers climb the metal steps to the crib's roof where storm-battered instruments are gathering wind data. Engineer Aaron Godwin says the numbers demonstrate the lake's energy potential.

Mr. AARON GODWIN (Engineer): This would be - actually, this would be a good example of a day where we would be generating some pretty decent power. If you look up the tower, you'll see that the instruments are spinning faster as you go up in elevation. Again, one of the reasons you come out here is it's unobstructed, so you get clean wind.

ST. CLAIR: Promoters of clean wind say in the next decade hundreds of turbines in Lake Erie could produce 1,000 megawatts of power, enough for 200,000 homes. The plan is to start next year with a five-turbine pilot project within sight of downtown Cleveland at a cost of \$100 million, raised from investors and loans.

Chris Wissemann is the project's developer. He says with turbine supplier G.E., engineering giant Bechtel, and Texas-based Cavallo Energy onboard, his company will likely win the nation's offshore wind race.

Mr. CHRIS WISSEMAN (Developer, Freshwater Wind): The Great Lakes will really be home to large-scale development of offshore wind long before we see it in the Atlantic.

ST. CLAIR: But first, engineers need to solve a problem that most ocean wind farms don't have: massive floes of shifting ice each winter.

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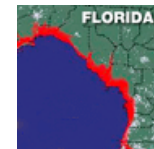
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Data from the ice sensor recovered from the lake bottom will help engineers like Dave Mattheisen design foundations that can withstand those icy pressures.

Mr. DAVE MATTHEISEN (Engineer): So what we're trying to do is get to a point of certainty so that we can design them appropriate for being in Lake Erie.

ST. CLAIR: That is without over-engineering them. With so many unknowns to overcome, each turbine will cost more than \$20 million, so much money that it could take decades to recoup the investment.

But developer Wissemann insists the high costs of the pilot project will be outweighed by the long-term benefits.

Mr. WISSEMAN: What we're talking about here now is a project that maybe produces high-priced power. And the trade-off to get that is to get jobs.

ST. CLAIR: But not everyone believes it is worth it. Cleveland industrialist Dan Moore has stakes in a dozen businesses, including one that builds turbine blades. But he says the numbers Wissemann is throwing around just don't add up.

Mr. DAN MOORE (Businessman): The concept of building windmills in Lake Erie is nonsense. A hundred million dollars for 3.4 megawatts, it doesn't come close to making sense. It's Alice in Wonderland.

ST. CLAIR: Moore thinks high-priced wind energy will not work in a region that needs electricity to power heavy industry.

Mr. MOORE: The math - your decimal point's off. I mean, you're not even close.

ST. CLAIR: Some other Great Lakes players are backing away from offshore wind turbine development because of environmental concerns. In Michigan, lawmakers and residents are concerned about disturbing the lake's natural beauty. Meanwhile in Canada, all of Ontario's offshore power projects have been put on hold.

But backers in Ohio say they've looked at the realities, and they're still optimistic. Lorry Wagner is head of the nonprofit Lake Erie Energy Development Company. He understands the challenges.

Mr. LORRY WAGNER (President, Lake Erie Energy Development Company): We know that we have to get it down to approximately half of what it is today and that's an immense challenge. I mean, we don't have any illusions about how difficult this is going to be.

ST. CLAIR: The world's first freshwater wind farm went online last year in Lake Vanern, Sweden. Engineers in Cleveland are hoping to benefit from lessons learned there. And they say the project's engineering problems are actually the easiest to solve - it's the political and economic challenges that are likely to remain the thorniest.

For NPR News, I'm Jeff St. Clair.

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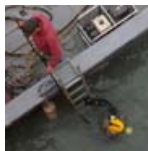
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Recent First



Mark P (KarlPopperFan) wrote:

"Some other Great Lakes players are backing away from offshore wind turbine development because of environmental concerns. In Michigan, lawmakers and residents are concerned about disturbing the lake's natural beauty. Meanwhile in Canada, all of Ontario's offshore power projects have been put on hold."

Next time you blame conservatives for blocking green energy, remember the above post.

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 8:08:44 PM

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Min Kim (ShortSharpShock) wrote:

Al Gore rips the GOP, the media, and Obama

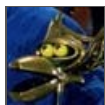
rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-of-denial-20110622#add-comment-or-reply

Seems relevant to the discussion.

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 6:44:51 PM

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Penny Lane (crooowww) wrote:

Too bad our government is so short sighted to keep subsidizing oil and gas instead of wind, water, and solar energy.

We're so 19th century.

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 1:37:58 PM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑

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c g (cdgraves) wrote:

Given the same time and investment as fossil fuels, renewables will do just as well.

Arguing up front cost is also disingenuous. You can't compare the cost to start up a new industry to the consumer price of gas.

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 12:22:10 PM

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decora decora (decora) wrote:

tom kant: the true cost of coal, gas, and oil are not reflected in the meter price. that cheapness is fake. its false. someone has to pay for black lung disease, for all of the wars to keep the oil flowing, for the bizarre alliances with saudi arabia and so forth. then there is the cost of air pollution to peoples health, and the hospital bills.

the cost of wind power doesnt have so much 'hidden' stuff with it. if you look at the 'real cost' things might be diffenet.

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 2:06:21 AM

[Recommend \(7\)](#) ↑

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decora decora (decora) wrote:

"What we're talking about here now is a project that maybe produces high-priced power, but the trade-off is to get jobs,"

uhmm did anyone else do a double take when they read that?

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 2:03:23 AM

[Recommend \(0\)](#) ↑

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Min Kim (ShortSharpShock) wrote:

I meant dismantled, but you get the gist...

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 12:52:49 AM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑

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Min Kim (ShortSharpShock) wrote:

@tom kent (Alaska)

That's a very dangerous argument you're making, Tom. We wouldn't be in this mess if Reagan hadn't savaged Carter's energy policies, cut off R&D for renewable energy projects, and dismantled the Nuclear Fusion project. You know, the same guy who sold Iran missiles behind our backs? Glad you're happy with the status quo, bro.

Wednesday, June 22, 2011 12:31:24 AM

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Ziyu Ziyu (ziyu) wrote:

jay james, fossil fuels still receive massive subsidies and they wouldn't be competitive today if it weren't for massive start up subsidies and infrastructure support in the early 1900s. Ethanol was actually the gaining a lot of traction as a fuel source until Standard Oil (Now Exxon-Mobil) bankrolled the 18th amendment and killed ethanol. If fossils got 100 years of government support, so should renewables. Fair's fair.

Tuesday, June 21, 2011 10:33:43 PM

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Ziyu Ziyu (ziyu) wrote:

Michael F, nuclear energy is the future of the world without a future. Nuclear can still play a role in the future, but it can't resemble the nuclear energy we have today. Generation IV or fusion is the only thing that won't go critical and kill us all. That Generation III+ stuff is just window dressing.

Tuesday, June 21, 2011 10:29:19 PM

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