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First Vineyard Wind turbines barged to offshore installation site



A Vineyard Wind turbine is barged out of New Bedford Harbor last week.
COURTESY OF VINEYARD WIND

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By Dean Geddes

Email: dgeddes@inkym.com

Twitter: [@DGeddesIM](https://twitter.com/DGeddesIM)

(Sept. 13, 2023) The first of 62 massive Vineyard Wind turbines arrived offshore this week after being barged out from New Bedford Harbor.

All summer the waters 15 miles southwest of the island have been full of the industrial buzz of construction as Vineyard Wind, the nation's first large-scale offshore wind farm, is planning to begin producing energy this fall.

“Over the past year, we have achieved significant milestones in the development of Avangrid’s Vineyard Wind 1, but the installation of the project’s first turbine stands as a singular landmark for offshore wind, clean energy and climate action in the United States,” Avangrid CEO Pedro Azagra said in a statement.

Vineyard Wind is a split venture between Avangrid and Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners. The project is estimated to cost upwards of \$4 billion.

Offshore wind farms in the region have faced criticism from groups concerned about the environmental impacts to the ocean and marine life and locally concerns about the impact the sight of wind turbines on the horizon could have on the tourism industry. The waters south of the island are prized by developers because of the combination of consistent high winds and relatively shallow water. A number of projects beyond Vineyard Wind are vying to set up shop in the area.

Vineyard Wind expects to have six of its planned 62 total wind turbines up and operational by as early as October. But Andrew Doba, a spokesperson for Vineyard Wind, said it doesn’t anticipate the entire project will be complete until at least the middle of 2024.

“We are definitely the tip of the spear for this industry,” Doba said. “We have hit all the firsts in terms of cable installation, breaking ground, the whole nine. It’s a history project.”

The windmills will rise 860 feet into the air, and some will be visible from the shores of the island, according to simulated images provided by Vineyard

Wind. Just how visible will start to become more clear over the coming months.

Earlier this summer, Vineyard Wind installed its offshore substation, the first in the nation, and has already driven the monopiles, or bases, for the first six turbines into the sea floor.

Vineyard Wind is one of a number of large-scale commercial offshore wind farms planned off the East Coast and in the Gulf of Mexico, as the Biden administration has made offshore wind and clean energy a major tenet of its climate agenda.

“President Biden set a goal of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind electricity generation by 2030 – enough to power more than 10 million American homes with clean energy, while creating good-paying jobs in the United States across manufacturing, shipbuilding, port operations, construction and other sectors,” a press release from the White House stated. “Since then, the Biden-Harris Administration’s transformative actions have jumpstarted the offshore wind industry across the country.”

Greg Werkheiser, a lawyer with Cultural Heritage Partners, special legal counsel to the town of Nantucket for offshore wind, said that if a portion of people no longer visit the island because of the turbines, tourism losses could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars over the next several decades.

“If we’re going to solve the global climate crisis everyone has to sacrifice, but the burden cannot be placed exclusively on the community, with the benefits going mostly to the companies,” he said at a Select Board meeting in February, discussing SouthCoast Wind, another wind farm that had planned to build 149 wind turbines in federal waters 23 miles south of Nantucket.

But in June South Coast Wind moved to terminate its existing contracts with Massachusetts because it said they were no longer viable because of rising interest rates and supply chain problems.

Werkheiser said that while most wind-farm developers are telling communities that the impact will be minimal for heritage tourism, one of those companies accidentally leaked a memo that estimated that 15 percent of

the people who visit the Jersey shore wouldn't come back once wind turbines obstructed the natural view of the open ocean.

According to Vineyard Wind, each turbine is capable of generating 13 megawatts of electricity. That energy will be transmitted through submarine cables to the mainland. Vineyard Wind will generate 800 megawatts of electricity annually, the environmental equivalent of removing 325,000 vehicles from roadways.

