



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on March 9, 2011

Environmentalists Against Windpower?

Environmentalists demand that America's oil companies do not drill for oil, even in those areas that have proven for many years to be safe for drilling, such as the Gulf of Mexico (the BP disaster notwithstanding), or in areas where hardly anyone lives, such as the north slope of Alaska. The lifeblood of the nation flows out to foreign nations that have no love for America, but the U.S. reaction has been to increase its military presence in the region rather than to reduce its dependence on those foreign sources. Consequently, when Libyans riot to end a brutal tyranny, U.S. futures markets shoot up the price of oil and President Obama orders naval vessels to the Mediterranean to protect U.S. oil supplies.



The idea that America cannot find enough oil from domestic sources to meet its needs is an ideological guess. "Known reserves" of most types of minerals have grown over time. The ocean, for example, could yield an enormous amount of mineral wealth if technology, economy, and law permitted its extraction. Rare earth minerals, the production of which has increasingly been concentrated in China, are actually not "rare" at all, but simply arduous to extract. The axiomatic fact that the United States does not have an infinite supply of an energy resource does not mean that it do not have an adequate supply for foreseeable needs.

The same animus against the creation of wealth by financially feasible forms of proven means exists for nuclear power plants. Environmentalists do not want nuclear power plants to be built, even though nuclear energy has safely provided France, for instance, with one-quarter of its electrical power for decades. Nuclear power is, in many ways, the cleanest form of energy. Coal is a fossil fuel that America has in abundance, and like drilling for oil, mining for coal creates good paying jobs in the private sector for American workers. Yet environmentalists no more want America to mine coal than they want it to build nuclear power plants or drill for oil. (Though some environmentalists, out of fear of "global warming," have recently changed their position to advocate more nuclear power. See, for example: "[Govt Scientists Propose Nuclear War to Curb Global Warming](#).")

Ask any radical environmentalist what America should do, and the reflexive answer is to pour more money into renewable energy, despite the fact that fossil fuel supplies will soon dry up. Pressed further, the environmentalist will recite familiar terms: solar power, geothermal power, and wind power — all "clean" and "renewable." No harm must be done to the "environment," although virtually everything that human beings do, in some way or the other affects the environment.

It should not be surprising, then, to learn that radical environmentalism is itself pocked with fierce internal tensions. Wind power provides a perfect example. In [Falmouth, Massachusetts](#), Neil Anderson lives by the nearby wind turbine — and it is ruining his environment: "Right now we are 1,320 feet,



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which is one-quarter mile, south of Wind One, which is Falmouth's first wind turbine. It's been online since April. And we've been trying to get it stopped since April," declares Anderson. He and his wife keep a log of how the turbine affects them: it keeps them awake at night; it gives them headaches; it even causes mood-swings.

The citizens of Falmouth complain that the wind turbine, which was installed last spring, endangers the environment of their town. As many as 50 people in Falmouth have complained that the noise is loud and it changes as the wind changes. Though Anderson, an energy conservationist, was an early and happy supporter of the wind turbine, he has changed his mind:

I was proud looking at it from this viewpoint — until it started turning. It is dangerous. [I have] headaches, loss of sleep. And the ringing in my ears never goes away. I could look at it all day, and it does not bother me. It's quite majestic — but it's way too close. This house has been my hobby, my investment, and we love it out here. We will move if we have to because we cannot live with [the turbine]. No, we cannot.

The blades of the turbine are almost 400 feet long, or roughly half the height of the John Hancock Building in Boston, and Wind One is 262 feet tall. Falmouth's citizens also complain about the giant shadows which its huge blades cast. Heather Harper, acting town manager, said that the low-level pulsing sound of the turbine does not bother her as much, but she notes: "The times I have been there I do not experience the impact of the effect that the neighbors have expressed that they've experienced. But I do believe that they are experiencing something that is very real to them."

David McGlinchey works for the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences in Plymouth, a group that provides science-based information to environmental policy makers. He notes that while Wind One has generated complaints, other turbines of similar size have been received well:

The existing peer-reviewed studies suggest that there are no health effects associated with the sound and noise from wind turbines. That being said, people clearly experience symptoms. People have headaches, people have their sleep disturbed, and people are not living well next to them in some situations. In some situations they are. So, both sides are right.

Whatever the scientific evaluation of the effects of wind turbine power, the experience of Falmouth has made it very hard to get approval to build other turbines in the Cape Code area. In Falmouth, the city government has agreed, in response to citizen complaints, to turn off the turbine when the wind speed exceeds 23 miles per hour. Wind Two, the second turbine, is scheduled to be turned on this spring. The city government, which has not yet made a final decision on how to use Wind One, finds itself in a quandary regarding Wind Two, which is just as big and is close to Wind One. It would seem that the noise and shadows of the two machines operating together will create even more complaints from townspeople.

Wind turbines are part of the environmental trade-off connected with almost any effort to make America "green." In the Great Plains, for example, where there is plenty of wind to be "harvested," wind turbines kill a huge number of birds, including endangered species and game birds. Take away government support, which underlines many activities such as wind turbines, and what do you get? Windmills were once a common sight in the Great Plains, and many farmers use them still. Why? They make economic sense. No government bureaucrat or college research team was needed to tell tough frontier farmers what worked and what didn't. Water was pumped from wells with windmills. Grain could be ground and power generated, although those were definitely secondary uses.



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The [Kennedy family](#) fought for a decade to keep wind turbines away from their ancestral home in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. still calls the project a “boondoggle” that will cost taxpayers billions of dollars and threaten the local fishing industry. One group, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound in Hyannis, tied up the project for over 15 years because it “polluted” the ocean views of residents in this exclusive area. The Massachusetts state government has given the go-ahead for this project, and the company planning the development, Cape Win Associates, wants to install 130 turbines in an offshore area called “Horseshoe Shoal.” It will cost well over \$2 billion, excluding transmission lines.

Aside from ocean view pollution, noise pollution, and sunshine pollution — or whatever names the people in this part of Massachusetts choose to use to oppose the wind turbines, the situation illustrates how poorly government balances interests. If wind turbines were really cost-effective, then utilities would be clamoring to install them, not couching their activities in terms of environmentalism or potential federal grants. Noise, ocean views, and the rest are balanced in the private economic decisions that everyone makes all the time. Moreover, property values and the desirability of homes and neighborhoods fluctuate based upon the attractiveness, the cleanliness, and the peacefulness of communities.

It is also simply not true that private property owners cannot protect their investments from noisy turbines or eyesores. With no government help at all, thoughtful residents have long created private covenants as homeowners to restrict their communities. Private property works well in protecting all the good things in life one wishes to preserve.



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