

OBSERVER

BREAKING NEWS

Cassadaga man pleads guilty in sex-assault case

Speaker says offshore wind a clean option



OBSERVER Photo Dr. Ellen Banks, right, of the Sierra Club speaks with an audience member following her “Wind works” presentation at the Clarion Hotel Marina & Conference Center in Dunkirk.

Roaring diesel engines to generate power in Block Island, R.I., were a way of life for this small community that relied on tourism to drive its economy. But the recession of 2008-09 changed the way residents south of the mainland looked at electricity.

Delray Beach, FL:

Did You Know?

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TAP YOUR AGE:

18-25	26-35	36-45
46-55	56-65	Over 65

EVERQUOTE

At that time, fuel prices reached some of their highest levels ever. Block Island's solution? Offshore wind power.

Today, residents there say not only is the wind energy providing a clean power source, but the turbine towers off the island are an attraction for those who are visiting.

Here in Western New York, however, there is already plenty of pushback against turbines going into the Lake Erie waters. In recent months, Diamond Generating Corp. have indicated an interest in wind farms that would include 50 turbines from southern Lake Erie to Dunkirk.

Dr. Ellen Banks, in a League of Women Voters presentation to 110 in attendance at the Clarion Hotel Marina & Conference Center in the city last week, indicated that she as a member of the Sierra Club believes the project could benefit the region's economy and long-term health. *"We are dedicated to Lake Erie and would never do anything that harm or support anything that would be harmful to the lake,"* she said.

Her audience was not full of supporters of the idea. Some came with an agenda, while others came to hear a point of view.

Upon entering the hotel parking lot, lines were drawn. One car license

plate parked outside the hotel read “*LESSCO₂*,” while a sign at the front entrance prominently placed stated “*No protest signs allowed.*”

Banks’ more than one-hour presentation lost its focus on offshore wind more than once. Often, she would note the Sierra Club’s stance on specific environmental issues or offer an opinion on different avenues for power generation.

Her organization’s efforts to help successfully shut down the NRG Energy Inc. power plant on the city’s waters also made it into the presentation.

“*Wind produces none of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change,*” Banks said.

Nonetheless, she offered some substantial cases for wind power on the waters. Most significantly is the lack of resistance from the winds. At one point, Banks noted, the Great Lakes could “*hold enough energy to power the entire country.*”

“*That would be a lot of wind turbines in our lake,*” she said. “*That just shows you the potential of wind that properly sited and spaced out, it is really a very tremendous resource to make our air and water cleaner.*”

Banks also touched on some of the main issues opponents cite when making their disdain known the proposal. She said wind turbines are a cleaner option for water — and fish will benefit from where the structures are located. In Rhode Island, one fisherman noted in the Sierra Club documentary shown at the beginning, the cod population had started to return to the area.

“*Unlike coal-fired power plants, wind emits no mercury, which continues to poison our water bodies and our fish and all our aquatic life,*” Banks said. “*Fossil fuel is bad for fish. It’s bad for the lake.*”

One area to watch is Cleveland, Banks noted. The city and state of Ohio are on the cusp of an offshore wind project that is nearly ready to begin and include six turbines. She told the audience the turbines will not be visible from the shore and be far enough out in the waters and not noticeable.

Banks, toward the end of the presentation, noted there is only one known fresh-water wind turbine project. It is Lake Vanern in Sweden, which is one-third the size of Lake Erie and contains many of the fish found here. *“This project has been in operation for 10 years ... and there are no negative impacts that have been reported. But we’re going to stay tuned on that.”*

Following the presentation, only written questions were taken. Banks, before taking the questions, said wind power is a viable option that includes very few others than business as usual.

“You have a moral obligation to purpose a scientifically and economically valid alternative and there really aren’t any,” she said.
