

Offshore wind farm developer scaling back plans

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WEST MICHIGAN — Norwegian developers are in the process of cutting their proposed Lake Michigan **Aegir Offshore Wind Farm** in half and moving it further from the Silver Lake State Park shoreline.

Officials from **Scandia Wind Offshore LLC** say they are reacting to overwhelming **negative reaction** to the location of their original plan for a 1,000-megawatt, \$3 billion wind farm. As originally proposed, the 100 to 200 wind turbines would sit on 100 square miles off the near shore of the Oceana-Mason county line.

Scandia is reconfiguring its proposal to uniformly move the wind farm to four miles off the Lake Michigan shoreline, according to project manager Harald Dirdal of Scandia and its Norwegian partner, **Havgul Clean Energy AS**.

The original proposed layout came within two miles of the Silver Lake sand dunes. Under the new plan, that southern end of the wind farm would be eliminated, company officials said.

“We are taking serious the feedback we have gotten,” Dirdal said of the organized opposition that has grown since the project was presented in December. “We will scale (the plans) down and reshape them.

“We will dramatically reduce the size, and it will be four miles from shore all the way along the coast. We will cut the southern part and might move it all slightly to the north.”

Leaders from the Lake Michigan POWER Coalition — the well-organized group opposing the wind farm — will not end their opposition to the Scandia project based on the changes discussed by the developer.

“Making the project smaller does not alleviate our environmental or economic impact concerns,” POWER Coalition President Jeff Hoenle said. “Many studies need to be completed to determine if wind energy development in the Great Lakes is even a good idea. Until a regulatory process is in place, it does not make sense to discuss any theoretical proposal.”

Specifics of the newly designed wind farm layout will be made public by the end of the month, Dirdal said. The changes in the wind farm plan are being made after meetings last week with public officials in Mason and Oceana counties, he said.

With the scaled-down proposal, Scandia will write letters to Mason and Oceana

counties asking for the county boards' advice on moving forward. The wind farm developers said they hope to have county board advisory votes by mid-summer.

Scandia will want an initial vote of support for the company to begin costly economic and environmental studies, Dirdal said. Public officials will have plenty of points along the development path to object to the company's plans as state and federal permits are sought, Scandia officials have said. The wind farm timeline has construction beginning in 2015.

Scandia CEO Steve Warner said his company is not surprised at the resolutions of opposition adopted last week by the Pentwater Village Council and the Pentwater Township Board of Trustees. The greatest opposition to the Scandia plans has come from the Pentwater area.

"We'll ask the counties, not the townships," Dirdal said. "We'll ask the whole community."

Havgul has been developing onshore and offshore wind farms since 1995, mainly in Europe, but it also is developing the huge Mariah Wind Power Project in the panhandle of Texas. It's five times the size of the original Lake Michigan plan. Dirdal said some local opposition always arises.

"Locally, this is very normal ... we've had it at all of our projects," Dirdal said.

However, Scandia officials said they are "shocked" at the reception they've received from state economic development officials in Lansing, even before the county boards have taken a position.

Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth Director Stanley "Skip" Pruss has said the Scandia project is in the "wrong place at the wrong time." Pruss chairs the Michigan Great Lakes Wind Council, which is working to develop state guidelines for offshore wind development.

"I am so surprised at the lack of respect for the local democratic process," Dirdal said, admitting as a Norwegian he is learning about the American political process. "You have to respect democracy at all levels."

In an interview with The Chronicle, Pruss made it clear that the Scandia proposal is not winning points in Lansing.

"We are happy to engage with Scandia on offshore wind development," Pruss said. "But thus far, the Scandia project proposal is inconsistent with our evolving guidelines which are being developed to protect our residents and resources.

"Michigan offers tremendous resources to attract the offshore wind energy industry. However, we must harness this resource thoughtfully in a way that will provide

clean energy and create jobs while still protecting the Great Lakes today and in our future.”

Scandia officials have said they want to receive an initial thumbs up or down on their plans from the two counties before they formally approach state regulators.

The governor-appointed Wind Council has been working on policies and regulations concerning wind farms on the lakes for more than a year. It produced a policy statement in a Sept. 1 report on siting wind farms on Michigan-controlled waters.

It was a map within the Sept. 1 Wind Council report that Scandia used to help find its original wind farm site — an area that is most favorable, due to wind strength, water depths and access to the electrical grid at the Ludington Pumped Storage Plant. The Wind Council map shows a portion of the project area in a “favorable” zone and the other portion in a “conditional” zone.

“With those maps, you invite the developers to go to that area,” Dirdal said. “You’d expect the state to talk to the local governments before they published those maps.”

State officials have been receiving a rush of public comment on the Scandia plans at a time that they have not received a formal request from the company, nor does the state have regulations in place to respond to the company or the public.

However, in a form letter to those contacting the state, Wind Council Director Michael Klepinger writes: “The Scandia project, as it is currently being described, would not fall within the areas identified as most favorable for wind energy development, based on the criteria developed by the council.”

The Wind Council also is developing legislative language for a law setting the rules and process for offshore wind farm approval in Michigan.

A bill is expected to be introduced in the coming months. Dirdal said Scandia awaits the legislative process to produce the regulations it must meet if it goes forward on its Lake Michigan plans.

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