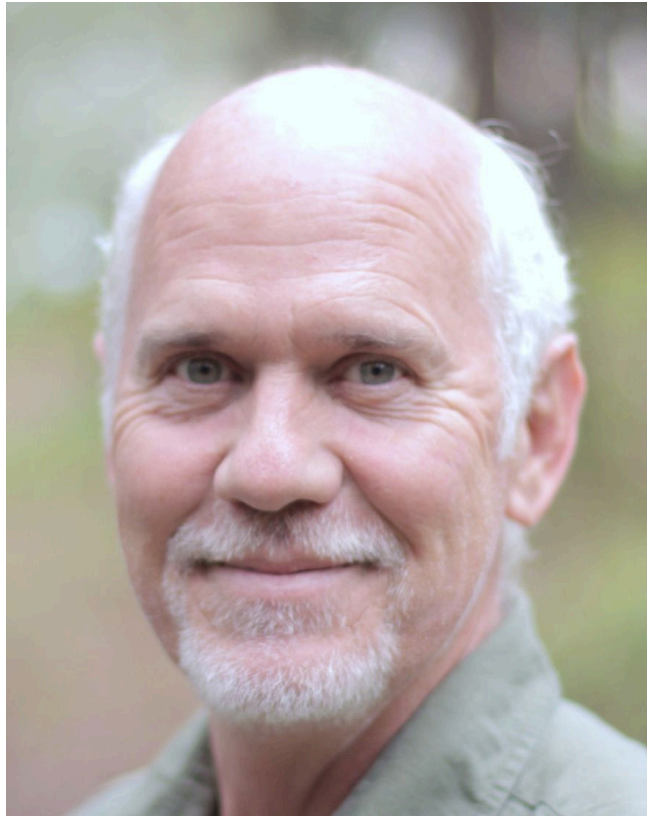


Guest Opinion: The answer is blowing in the wind

September 5, 2022



I attended the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority meeting last Thursday. Five out of six members were present, including Brian Stone, Wes White, Darrin Short, Chris Howard and Blake Inscore. There were also two members of the public participating in the discussion, me and one other person.

Except for a surprisingly contentious verbal exchange between one of the Board members and the other attendee, this was mostly a productive meeting. They appear to have a strategy for retiring the outstanding debt that occurred because of defaulted business loans, but I will leave it to them to tell that story.

The second item on the agenda was simply listed as “Discuss offshore wind power.” This is precisely what the Tri-Agency should be doing. Whether it is wind power or another economic development project, if the Tri-Agency begins discussion of possible projects, people would be more likely to recognize the benefit of this government agency.

Offshore wind farms are coming to California, and we better start paying attention.

Recently, the California Energy Commission approved new targets for offshore wind development. According to a story in the San Francisco Chronicle (8/11/22) the goal is to produce 25 gigawatts of electricity from offshore wind by 2045. This would be 11 times the capacity of the state's last remaining nuclear power plant and could eventually account for 25 percent of the state's electricity needs.

This process has already begun. Earlier this year, the US Department of the Interior published a Proposed Sale Notice for three lease areas in the outer continental shelf of California. One lease area is near Morro Bay and two are in the Humboldt Bay area. These projects have the potential to generate 4.5 gigawatts of electricity, enough to power 1.5 million homes.

This is just the start. There is potential for offshore wind to be developed in the open ocean near Crescent City. According to wind maps, we have the strongest and most reliable sources of wind of anywhere in the country. This is too tempting to overlook.

According to Tri-Agency Board member Brian Stone, future leases off the coast of Crescent City could produce 10 gigawatts of electricity. He estimates the retail value of this power would be \$7 billion annually. Offshore wind could be an economic boon for our county. New jobs and businesses could be created in construction, maintenance, and related services.

There could also be ecological consequences, but if we engage in this process early we can ensure the economic development benefits are maximized and the environmental impacts are minimized. Often communities can negotiate Community Benefit Agreements to help mitigate impacts. This can include direct payments to governments or non-profit agencies.

There are many steps to be completed before offshore wind platforms are built off our coast. The lease is just the first step. Once a lease is secured, the company must prepare a detailed project description which will undergo a thorough environmental impact review.

There are some legitimate environmental concerns that need to be addressed, but I would suggest that these impacts should be compared to the impacts of traditional energy sources, like offshore oil drilling. The driving impetus for developing wind, solar and other renewable energy is to reduce burning of fossil fuels so we can avert an impending global climate disaster. We must consider every possible clean energy option. There are no perfect solutions. Everything will have some environmental impact.

There are existing wind farms off the East Coast. These are in shallower water and the wind platforms rest on the ocean floor. In California, wind turbines will be on floating platforms that are anchored by cables to the ocean floor. This raises concerns about the possible entanglements of whales and sea turtles.

These wind platforms will likely be far enough offshore that we will not see them from land, but the power cables must come ashore somewhere. The challenge in developing wind on the north coast is that the electricity distribution system is not easily accessed. New transmission lines would have to be built to move the power to other parts of the grid.

I have seen fully developed land-based wind farms across our country, from California to Minnesota. New businesses have sprung up to produce the blades for these wind turbines. Jobs have been created to transport these blades to the construction site. I have encountered trucks hauling wind blades on the highway and it is an impressive sight. One blade is over 100 feet long and there is not a road into Crescent City that would accommodate this.

The blades for the proposed offshore wind turbines will be up to 300 feet long, the length of a football field. These will need to be manufactured somewhere else and transported by barge to the construction site.

Whether you are a proponent or a sceptic of offshore wind, it is a good idea to start paying attention now. I am convinced that we need to move aggressively away from fossil fuels and develop renewable clean energy.

The answer my friend is blowing in the wind.

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