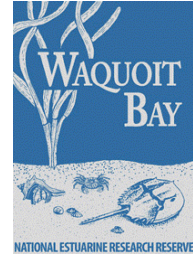




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**“Beyond Cape Wind” Planning Process Launched; Public Asked to Weigh In on Energy-Related Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Cape & Islands**

Participants in the Cape & Islands Renewable Energy Collaborative (CIREC) are initiating coordinated community planning activities geared toward managing and accelerating the local and regional transition to a sustainable energy future.

“We suffer from high energy prices, we are vulnerable to oil spills and other environmental problems, and we will experience the brunt of future climate change,” says Chris Powicki, principal of Water Energy & Ecology Information Services. “Individuals and organizations should be collaborating to address these critical challenges, rather than spending so much time and energy arguing about an offshore wind project over which we have limited control.”

Community planning activities will engage local and regional stakeholder groups in characterizing the present energy situation, envisioning the energy future, and working together to promote adoption of cleaner and green supply and use options throughout Cape Cod, Martha’s Vineyard, and Nantucket.

“Energy shapes so many aspects of modern existence, but it is rarely looked at from a holistic perspective,” says Megan Amsler, executive director of Cape & Islands Self-Reliance. “Comprehensive, inclusive, and transparent planning activities will help inform decision-making on a full spectrum of energy-related issues, including cost of living, air and water quality, economic development, affordable housing, transportation, public health, village-centered growth, cultural heritage, and sustainability.”

To jumpstart the process, CIREC participants have partnered with representatives from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology-U.S. Geological Survey Science Impact Collaborative (MUSIC) to create an on-line survey. The survey is designed to encourage the public and other stakeholders to weigh in on and prioritize energy-related issues. It may be accessed from the home page of the Cape & Islands Energy Information Clearinghouse (<http://www.cirenew.info>) or directly from the following URL: <http://web.mit.edu/amostash/www/CIREC/SURVEY.htm>.

The CIREC-MUSIC team has also invited local and regional officials and representatives from environmental and business organizations, state and federal agencies, energy companies, and other key stakeholder groups to attend a mid-April meeting hosted by Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (WBNERR). Stakeholder opinions expressed through the survey and at the meeting will guide the development of both a model of the Cape & Islands energy economy and fact sheets characterizing the “true costs” of the current energy situation.

The model, to be created with support from MUSIC, will illustrate how electricity and fuels are supplied to, purchased by, and used by Cape & Islands consumers, and it will identify alternative energy options consistent with the local resource base. It will also show the interconnections among energy systems and diverse economic, environmental, and social issues.

The fact sheets, to be created with support from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, will present scientific information on the effects of the fossil-fuel-based energy economy on local and regional concerns such as cost of living, business competitiveness, air pollution, eutrophication, wildlife and habitat, health risks, and climate change. They will address priority issues identified by stakeholders, and they will be researched, written, reviewed, and validated through a joint fact-finding process to be initiated at the mid-April meeting.

“The idea is to build consensus among local and regional stakeholders on key issues and to identify critical knowledge gaps,” says Joan Muller, education coordinator for WBNERR. “The fact-based tools participants come up with through this collaborative process will build a foundation for future community planning and outreach activities.”

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**Cape & Islands Renewable Energy Collaborative** brings together diverse individuals and organizations with common interest in achieving a sustainable energy future, both locally and globally. It is a nonprofit, participatory collaborative with an overall objective of maximizing benefits and minimizing adverse impacts associated with energy supply and use in the Cape & Islands region.

**Water Energy & Ecology Information Services** (WEEinfo) is a research, communications, and planning firm fostering understanding of the interdependencies between human society and natural ecosystems.

**Cape & Islands Self-Reliance Corp.** is a nonprofit membership organization promoting environmentally sound technologies and sustainable practices through education, advocacy, and collective action.

**Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve** (WBNERR) advances understanding of natural estuarine and watershed-linked processes and human influences on them to promote informed decision-making in coastal communities. Part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, WBNERR is co-funded and co-managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, Estuarine Reserves Division and by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.