



## S E L I G H T H O U S E B L O C K I S L A N D R I

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### **AS BLOCK ISLAND WIND TURBINES MULTIPLY FROM 5 TO 599, HISTORIC PRESERVATION GROUP FILES FEDERAL APPEALS**

November 22, 2023. Block Island, RHODE ISLAND: The Southeast Lighthouse Foundation (SELF), which owns and manages Block Island’s most iconic historic structure and New England’s highest lighthouse, today appealed the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)’s permitting decisions for two of the massive offshore wind farms planned by Danish-owned energy behemoth Ørsted.

Block Island, the first US community to host an offshore wind farm, is awakening to the reality that the number of visible turbines off its coast will soon grow from five to as many as 599<sup>1</sup> and despoil the Island’s treasured views for the next thirty years. The historic Southeast Lighthouse is a National Historic Landmark—honored by the Nation’s highest designation of historic importance reserved for the likes of the Lincoln Memorial and the Golden Gate Bridge. A world-renowned symbol of Block Island’s rich cultural heritage, the Southeast Light is among numerous historic resources that the government has failed to protect from what BOEM itself concedes are significant negative impacts of the industrialization of the seascape.

SELF’s appeals allege that, in a process rushed by political pressures from the White House, BOEM has conducted sham regulatory reviews. The filings inventory dozens of failures to comply with the key requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the

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<sup>1</sup> According to BOEM, Block Island’s Atlantic Ocean views, including from the Southeast Lighthouse, will be occupied by up to 599 turbines visible to the naked eye when current lease areas are built out, including South Fork, Revolution, Sunrise, Bay State/Revolution Wind 2, New England Wind Phase 1 and 2, Beacon Wind, and Vineyard Wind North. *See* Bureau of Ocean Energy Mgmt., Cumulative Historic Resources Visual Effects Analysis, Revolution Wind Farm (Aug. 2022) at 42.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), including approving individual farms without appropriately considering the cumulative adverse effects of 599 turbines from seven contiguous planned farms. The appeals contend that BOEM, the federal agency responsible for ensuring balance between offshore development projects and harm to environmental and historic resources, has all but abandoned its post. Instead—the appeals allege—BOEM has handed the wheel to foreign energy executives who have never set foot on Block Island.

Dr. Gerry Abbott, Chairman of the SELF Board, stated, “Block Island is obviously not anti-Wind Energy. We were the first town in the US to host a fully built offshore wind farm. But imagining the visual impact of an 11,000% increase in the number of visible turbines off our Coast—and knowing they will remain for the next 30 years—is nothing short of stunning.....a complete industrialization of our ocean view.”

Block Island is not the only community raising concerns about the BOEM-Ørsted juggernaut. Today preservation leaders in Newport, Rhode Island, also filed suit, alleging similar legal failures. A month ago, Cape May County, New Jersey, [filed a federal suit against BOEM](#) over permitting in two immense Ørsted wind farms, both of which Ørsted [subsequently cancelled](#), citing the company’s failure to predict financial pressures on the project. Even the National Congress of American Indians, an organization whose hundreds of member Tribal Nations have long prioritized environmental stewardship, has [called for a moratorium](#) on offshore wind development citing BOEM’s failures to consult appropriately.

Ørsted wrote down almost [\\$5.6 billion in losses and lost as much as 50% of its stock value](#) as a result of its poor planning for East Coast projects. Instead of working with coastal communities and Tribal Nations to develop creative solutions, however, Ørsted is now fighting state and municipal governments, trying to [back out of funding commitments](#) and [renegotiate power sale agreements](#). Despite these widespread management failures, Ørsted, backed by BOEM, still insists it knows best when it comes to Block Island’s character and heritage tourism economy.

Indeed, Ørsted is treating Block Island very differently than other communities its projects will impact. For example, Ørsted committed [\\$170 million to Brookhaven, New York](#) and [\\$29 million to the Town of East Hampton](#) to mitigate the temporary negative impacts of burying a power cable. By contrast, despite proposing to occupy 100% of Block Island’s views from its Atlantic coast beaches for thirty years, Ørsted and BOEM have offered the Town virtually nothing except a hodgepodge of nonsensical mitigation measures, such as weed-whacking the Lighthouse parking lot. Indeed, the paltry mitigation offered for the adverse effects of hundreds of turbines falls significantly short of the modest mitigation provided to the Island for the construction of just five turbines that comprise the Block Island Wind Farm. Ørsted’s own study shows that visitation to coastal communities could drop by 15% when the ocean views become industrialized—a conservative estimate that could cost Block Island more than \$1B in lost tourism revenues alone.

SELF’s Executive Director Lisa Nolan emphasized the need to balance renewable energy with the importance of preserving Block Island’s sense of place and its economy, which relies significantly on heritage tourism. “Five wind turbines off the coast may have a certain charm and interest, but a forest of 599 wind turbines will alter the Island's character for generations to come.

It seems unfair to place all potential risks on our historic community while the developer reaps the rewards,” she said.

[Cultural Heritage Partners](#) serves as legal counsel to SELF in the appeals. Partner William Cook observed: “Gutting the laws safeguarding cultural and environmental resources because you like wind projects ensures that those laws will remain gutted when you need their protections against the harms of fossil fuel projects.” The outcomes of the Block Island and Newport appeals are expected to have broader implications, potentially affecting the legal framework for future development projects across the United States.

Dr. Abbott concluded: “As our neighbors and visitors come to realize how these wind farms have forever changed Block Island, they will ask, ‘Why didn’t our community do more to demand balance? They won’t be able to blame us. We may be David slinging at Goliath, but we believe the Rule of Law is on our side.’”

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