

## RI OFFSHORE WIND

# Newport, Block Island preservation groups seek relief from wind farms' anticipated 'adverse effects'

They seek to reduce the number of turbines planned closest R.I. shores, and a mitigation fund to offset anticipated losses of tourism, tourism-dependent jobs, property values, and tax revenue

By **Carlos R. Muñoz** Globe Staff, Updated November 30, 2023, 4:00 p.m.



From the balcony of the Breakers in Newport, R.I. ORSTED VISUALIZATION

**NEWPORT** — The Newport Cliff Walk, meandering 3½ miles along the Rhode Island coast, draws more than 1.2 million visitors each year, according to the City of Newport. This scenic trail links the city's Gilded Age mansions on one

side, and on the other, seafaring ships gracefully navigate rows of tall whitecaps.

The spot is perfect for unforgettable snapshots, but those memories could soon include clusters of offshore wind turbines.

On Nov. 22, Cultural Heritage Partners, filed four separate [federal complaints](#), alleging that the industrialization of the ocean near Newport and Block Island could cost the communities billions of dollars in lost tourism revenue during the wind farms' 30-year project life.

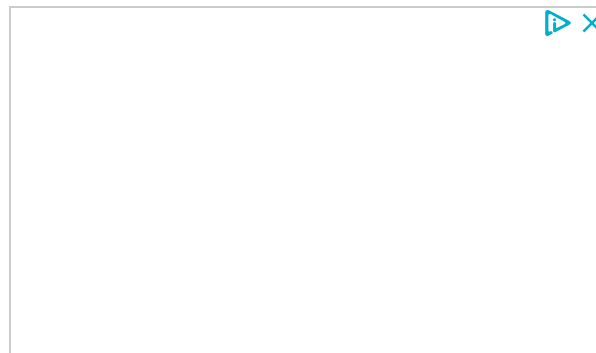
The municipalities of Newport and New Shoreham, where the preservation groups are located, are not part of the legal action.

The law firm was hired by [The Preservation Society of Newport County](#) and Block Island's [Southeast Lighthouse Foundation](#).

The lawsuits were filed just two days after full federal approval was granted to the 100-turbine [Revolution Wind Farm](#) to build 100 turbines 12.7 miles from Little Compton, R.I., and 15 miles from Block island.

The South Fork Wind Farm, approved in January 2022, will add 12 turbines 15 miles southeast of Block Island, and supply power to New York. It will be built near the five-turbine Block Island Wind Farm, the first offshore wind farm in the United States.

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[Revolution Wind](#) will have an estimated capacity of 704 megawatts of clean energy, capable of powering nearly 250,000 homes in Rhode Island and Connecticut.

These wind farms off Rhode Island's coast were developed by Danish-owned multinational energy company Ørsted, which plans to build close to 500 offshore farms over the next three decades.

Cultural Heritage Partners says that Ørsted's own study shows that coastal communities in view of wind farms could see a 15 percent reduction in tourism. That could mean tourism losses of \$5.17 billion for Newport, and \$1.51 billion for Block Island, according to the law firm.

The projected economic impacts don't account for inflation, property value, taxes, or permanent job losses, according to Greg Werkheiser, Cultural Heritage Partners' attorney.



A visualization of the Revolution Wind Farm from the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown, R.I. ORSTED VISUALIZATION

Claire O'Brien, Cultural Heritage Partners' preservation practice coordinator, told the Globe in an email that the Preservation Society of Newport County and Southeast Lighthouse Foundation "support offshore wind," but Ørsted's latest projects were designed without adequately considering community losses.

The federal complaints, which name Deb Haaland in her role as Interior Secretary, the US Department of Interior, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, do not name Ørsted as a defendant.

O'Brien said the complaints are needed to restart the permitting process to give BOEM a opportunity to "design appropriate mitigation for adverse effects" that can't be avoided.

The preservation groups' complaints say that the Revolution Wind turbines will reach a skyscraping 873 feet tall, and the South Fork turbines will be 840 feet tall. Rhode Islanders can compare them to the size of two Superman buildings.

As part of the Block Island Wind Farm proposal, expensive broadband fiber was negotiated to deliver high-speed internet to the Town of New Shoreham, and the island was able to replace an old diesel-burning power station with wind energy.

While some island residents are thrilled over the new benefits, the Southeast Lighthouse Foundation's enthusiasm has waned in the last six months due to concerns over wind farms cluttering views of the ocean from the lighthouse.

## Town Council Windfarm Session 10/25/2023



*(Watch Cultural Heritage Partners' presentation to the New Shoreham Town Council on the anticipated visual impacts of the proposed wind farms.)*

After filing the complaints, Cultural Heritage Partners said it received numerous questions about the preservation groups' appeals and developed "[Answers to frequently asked questions regarding appeals of BOEM's permitting of offshore wind industrialization.](#)"

The FAQ page, along with the [complaints](#), allege that BOEM fast-tracked wind farm permits under "intense political pressure," and skipped steps without considering requirements for development impacts.

O'Brien said the wind farms did not include proper mitigation required by law.

BOEM has not responded to the Globe's request for comment.



Giovanni Rocco, an Interior Department spokesperson, said the agency had “nothing” to say about the federal complaint.

Other wind farms in the works around Newport and Block Island include Sunrise, New England Wind Phase 1 and 2, Beacon Wind, and Vineyard Wind North. The [Bay State/Revolution Wind 2 proposal](#) was also listed in the complaints, but in July, Rhode Island Energy said it would not move forward with the deal, in part, because it would be too expensive for customers.

Cultural Heritage Partners filed a similar appeal [Ørsted's](#) Ocean Wind 1 and 2 projects on behalf of Cape May County, New Jersey, but the company later canceled the projects citing economic and supply chain pressures.

Unlike the Block Island Wind Farm, the Revolution Wind and South Fork are not offering any big-ticket benefits for impacted communities. The lawsuits allege that “nonsensical” measures such as “weed-whacking the Lighthouse parking lot,” were offered.

O'Brien said it is not uncommon for conditions to be developed during the environmental review process. Examples include the [\\$91 million](#) offered by Dominion Energy to mitigate visual impacts of massive transmission lines across the James River near a National Historic Landmark in Jamestown, Virginia.

“If Dominion had to mitigate \$91 million for just a few transmission towers and no economic impacts, what should Ørsted and other developers pay for 457 turbines — 599 for Block Island — for both viewshed and economic impacts,” asked Werkheiser, Cultural Heritage Partners' attorney.

The Town of Nantucket negotiated a [“Good Neighbor Agreement”](#) with Vineyard Wind for approximately [\\$34.4 million](#) as financial mitigation.



One option the preservation groups' complaint suggests is reducing the number of turbines nearest to Newport County, or creating a mitigation fund for Block Island to address economic impacts of the expected loss of tourism, on which more than 8,000 local jobs depend, according to Cultural Heritage Partners.

## Rhode Island Offshore Wind Farm appeals

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