

Ann Arbor startup hopes to facilitate offshore wind farms out of sight

Posted by [nbomey](#) September 18, 2008 12:18PM

Wind turbines may be among the most environmentally friendly forms of energy available, but coastal landowners often balk at the possibility of offshore wind turbines, complaining they ruin scenic views.

But one Ann Arbor startup is forming plans to develop, own and operate offshore wind farms that can't be seen from land.

Deep Water Wind, a startup led by former DTE Energy vice president Chris Brown, has investments from private equity firms. Brown, also former executive vice president of DTE Energy Resources, said the under-the-radar 2-year-old startup, which has 13 employees, is "totally funded."

Deep Water Wind licensed proprietary technology from Norway-based OWEC Tower, which allows wind farms to be installed 50 miles to 125 miles offshore -out of sight of the naked eye.

"What we're trying to do is get it far enough offshore so it's not viewable from the shore," Brown said. "What we should be focusing on is solutions that are beyond the horizon, because if we do, what can the objections be?"

Brown, the CEO, acknowledged that his company doesn't have much reason to be in Michigan - except that he lives here. He said if the state approved a renewable portfolio standard, which would require utilities to derive a set percentage of their electricity from renewable sources, it might help his cause.

But the company at first is targeting East Coast markets - including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, the coast of Manhattan and New Jersey.

Brown cited projections estimating that offshore wind energy could provide 330 gigawatts of power to the East Coast, enough to power 40 million homes.

"It's a very deep resource," Brown said. "The ocean winds are stronger than onshore winds, so as a result, you can put larger-size turbines and more economical uses out in the ocean."

Deep Water Wind would operate the wind farms and sell electricity to make a profit. Brown said the company expects to establish wind farms in the range of 400 megawatts to 1,000 megawatts.

"This is not small stuff," Brown said. "It's larger stuff that's really going to have a significant impact on renewables in each of the areas that we're working."

Brown said the U.S. is behind in developing wind farms outside of the "viewshed." He said it's already being done in the United Kingdom and Germany, for example.

"The U.S. has kind of failed so far to get any of these facilities up," Brown said.

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