

Navy study raises new concerns about industrial wind turbines

A high-ranking U.S. Navy official has written to the U.S. Senate's No. 2 Republican, Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, regarding the negative impact industrial wind turbines are having on Naval flight operations in South Texas (SOTEX).

Writing on behalf of the Acting Secretary of the Navy Sean J. Stackley, Deputy Assistant Secretary James B. Balocki wrote, "The Department of the Navy (DON) shares your concerns for the safety and operational readiness of our student aviators in SOTEX."

Due to the proliferation of industrial wind turbines in South Texas, the Navy commissioned a study to evaluate the cumulative effects of existing and proposed wind turbine farms in South Texas.

"The general conclusion of the study confirmed that primary radar detection may be significantly degraded in airspace immediately above wind farms and in some cases beyond the windfarm," Secretary Balocki wrote. "When flying in such areas of degraded primary radar coverage, there is increased risk to Navy pilots from civilian aircraft operating without active transponders."

The Navy study also found industrial wind turbines pose a physical obstruction concern, noting large clusters of 500-foot tall wind turbines will impact (flight) training due to safety requirements, requiring low-altitude flight training to be completed in a decreasing amount of airspace for military training operations.

"Determining when the overall impact of wind turbine development has reached the 'tipping point,' and determining when further operational mitigations by the Department of Defense represent an unacceptable risk to national security, presents a complex and difficult issue," Balocki said, adding the Navy will continue to study the impact industrial wind turbines have on radar.

He said if the Navy and industrial wind turbine developers cannot agree on "acceptable mitigations," the Navy would recommend to the Secretary of Defense that he object to future industrial wind turbine development.

"The Navy study confirms what we have been saying about the negative impact the proposed Lighthouse Wind project could have on flight operations around the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NAFARS)," said Pamela Atwater, president of Save Ontario Shores. "The project could endanger the encroachment-free zone which the base currently enjoys. The loss of this status could place NFARS at risk when the next Base Realignment and Closure process (BRAC) is convened.

"NFARS has been targeted for closure by two previous BRAC's, a process has not been kind to New York State which has seen the closure of seven military installations. We cannot risk NFARS being the eighth base to be added to that list."

Virginia-based Apex Clean Energy has proposed installation of as many as 70 industrial wind turbines in the towns of Somerset and Yates in Niagara and Orleans counties. The massive turbines would reportedly be more than 620 feet tall, making them the tallest turbines on land in the U.S. and the highest structures in New York State outside of New York City.

Pointing to similar concerns raised by U.S. Army officials at Fort Drum Watertown, Atwater said it appears the military is now speaking out more freely when it determines wind energy projects may interfere with and erode operational effectiveness.

Atwater is calling on Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to request a formal Department of Defense review of the project.

“It is clear officials in other states, faced with similar proposals, are moving to protect their military installations before the next BRAC begins. New York State now has fair warning that the issue of wind turbines near military installations could degrade military operations. Any base entering the next BRAC with such circumstances caused by a wind energy project could find itself slated for closure. The risks to NFARS and the entire Western New York region are just too high to take this risk.

“I am calling on Gov. Cuomo to use the power and influence of his office to call for a formal Department of Defense review of the Apex project,” Atwater said.

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About SOS: Residents and property owners who make up SOS share a deep appreciation for the unspoiled beauty of Somerset and Yates and the shoreline of Lake Ontario; their goal is to protect the rural environment, wildlife, the economy and its citizens by opposing the industrial wind turbine project.

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