

NIMBY

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By now, everyone knows the meaning of NIMBY and how it has become the standard accusation leveled at those who resist development close to home. In the offshore wind debate, the NIMBY label is often applied pejoratively against shorefront property owners—the presumably wealthy people who care only about protecting their ocean views. The comment section accompanying any article focusing on offshore wind opposition provides ample evidence of NIMBY hostility. Unfortunately, this vitriolic profiling obscures the very legitimate concerns that some have for preserving the unspoiled beauty of nature. Humans have desecrated so much of the earth—why must we continue down this exploitative path?

For many, the answer to the above question is easy: we are running out of time to reverse climate change and therefore must accept some sacrifices—even of valued resources. However, quantifying and then accepting the sacrifice often requires subjective assessments. Everyone subconsciously draws a line that can't be crossed. For New Yorkers, blanketing Central Park with solar arrays would be completely unacceptable. For others, installing a procession of wind turbines atop the ridge of an iconic mountain range might overstep the mark. A nuclear power plant situated a mile from your house—no way. Where would you draw the line in our quest to reduce CO2 emissions?

One's belief in the solution and personal experience will influence the answer to this question. Germane to the offshore wind debate, someone might presume that hundreds of wind turbines installed on the Outer Continental Shelf will not degrade anyone's enjoyment or use of our coastal waters. Some might even be reassured by the sight and view them as a reminder of our newfound commitment to clean energy. Others might mourn the loss of the pristine seascape and decry the industrialization of our oceans. With a firm belief in the efficacy of wind farms and absent a direct connection to the unique beauty of a particular area, one might be willing to tolerate more environmental risk. Regardless of one's opinion, the experience of gazing out at Rhode Island Sound or utilizing the coastal waters will never be the same.

When we first learned of the offshore wind developments, we were astonished by the scale of the turbines (taller than any building in Boston) and their proximity to the shore (9-15 miles). We found the industry's visual simulations to be misleading. They minimized the optical presence of the turbines by focusing on the foreground, blurring the background, and discounting how we subconsciously enlarge objects on the horizon. The turbines and offshore substations will impact the viewshed of 178 public beaches, 121 historic sites, and 93 state-designated scenic areas ([RWF-visual impact study](#)). Turbines standing 873-feet-tall can be seen from a distance of 36-40 miles. As the visual impact study states, the turbines and the offshore substations will dominate the horizon from many scenic areas in RI and MA, including the [Norman Bird Sanctuary](#), the [Cliff Walk in Newport](#), and [Aquinnah's beaches](#).

Our initial viewshed concerns were quickly eclipsed by the anticipated ecological impacts, as well as the projected inability of offshore wind to make a measurable impact on climate change. These issues remain at the core of our discussion—difficult to resolve and challenging to debate.

For those who prefer to cast all wind farm opponents as NIMBY, we respectfully suggest a slight edit to the acronym. Realistically, it should be NIOBY—not in *OUR* back yard. The industrialization of *our* coastal waters will affect millions of people—including the 20 million who visit RI’s public beaches each year—not just the few residents who are fortunate enough to own shorefront property.

Written on behalf of Green Oceans (info@green-oceans.org)