Assateague Coastal Trust
Position Statement on Offshore Wind Power
December 9, 2009

The mission of Assateague Coastal Trust (ACT) is to protect and enhance the natural resources of the Atlantic coastal bays watershed through advocacy, conservation, and education.

ACT has explored the potential benefits and impacts of nearshore and offshore development of wind power infrastructure along the Maryland coast and presents this position statement with qualified support for the development of offshore wind power. This position statement does not address land-based wind power development.

ACT recognizes the following:

- That the Delmarva coast has significant potential to produce energy from wind, and that a growing number of government agencies and citizens support the capture of that potential energy;
- That wind energy production avoids the high risks of air emissions or nuclear waste from conventional energy sources;
- That local wind energy has the potential to reduce air pollutants (CO_2, SO_2, NO_x, particulate matter, mercury, and other heavy metals), which currently degrade the coastal bays watershed, by displacement of conventional electricity generation, such as the regional coal-fired power plants;
- That local generation of wind power could reduce the economic incentive to clear habitat-fragmenting pathways for long-distance high-capacity power transmission lines; and
- That wind farm infrastructure, such as turbine foundations, may serve as an artificial reef, increasing abundance and diversity of species through increased availability of shelter, habitat, and food.

ACT supports the significant potential benefits of local wind power generation as described above while recognizing that great care must be taken in planning offshore infrastructure in order to minimize potential adverse impacts. Proposals to site, construct, and operate offshore infrastructure should address the following potential impacts on the watershed and environmental quality of the region:

- Potential degradation of benthos and benthic habitats by drilling, foundation construction, cable laying, and associated sediment disturbance and resettling;
- Potential impacts of lighting requirements and infrastructure on the natural viewshed, including the night sky, with regard to both wildlife and aesthetics;
- Impacts of underwater structures, sound, and vibration on behavior such as migration, breeding, nursing and feeding; cetacean communication using sound and vibration; and elasmobranch sensitivity to electromagnetic fields;
- Potential disruption of feeding patterns by an increase in prey fish or shifts in bird species;
- Impacts of onshore infrastructure to receive power, and of underwater cable to transmit power from offshore infrastructure; and
- Responsibility for removal and disposal of materials when the infrastructure is no longer productive.

In consideration of the enormous potential benefits to the health of the coastal bays watershed, ACT supports the responsible development of offshore wind energy infrastructure that is carefully sited to minimize potential impacts to the ocean's biological and physical resources.

If offshore wind power is developed as a power source for the mid-Atlantic coast, ACT offers the following recommendations:

- Areas identified as biologically or physically sensitive, and areas of high archaeological or recreational values, should not be developed with offshore infrastructure.
- All offshore wind power projects should include a demonstration of clear and substantial public benefit (including environmental benefit), long-term ecological monitoring (including pre-construction and post-construction surveys), and adaptive mitigation measures that incorporate monitoring results.
- Construction and maintenance of wind energy infrastructure (including turbines and transmission cables) should seek to avoid degradation of submerged habitats and impacts on aquatic species whenever possible, and to minimize and mitigate for impacts to the aesthetic and wildlife value of the viewshed and night sky, to bird migration, and to the health of the coastal bays watershed.
- Our community stakeholders, including ACT, should work to develop a robust citizen's advisory group, to be kept informed of developments and to provide input throughout the design, construction, and operation of offshore wind projects.