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Sat 12 Jul 2008 | 19:37 EDT

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July 10th, 2008

A green energy solution that's out of this world

Post a comment (2)
Posted by: Nichola Groom
Tags: Environment, Cape Cod, JPL, Massachusetts, NASA, offshore wind farms, QuikSCAT, wind

The quest for more renewable energy sources recently got a boost that's out of this world.

NASA researchers this week said they are using global satellite data to create maps of ocean areas best suited for wind energy.

The maps will be useful in planning where to build offshore wind farms that can convert wind energy to electricity, according to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. Islands of floating wind farms have the potential to generate 500 to 800 watts per square meter, according to research conducted by Tim Liu, a senior research scientist at the JPL.

"No group of people have measured the amount of wind power over the entire ocean. Now for the first time we have a map," Liu said in an interview. "You can actually quantify how much power is in what place. The map gives you this tool for where to place these (wind) farms."

NASA's QuikSCAT satellite tracks the power, speed and direction of ocean wind using a specialized microwave radar. Created in 1999, the QuikSCAT is normally used for predicting storms and checking the accuracy of weather forecasts.

Offshore wind farms are one answer to critics' claims that towering wind turbines disturb wildlife habitats and spoil landscapes. Also, the wind blows stronger over the ocean because it doesn't have hills, mountains or buildings blocking its way.

The challenge of moving the electricity from the middle of the ocean to utility customers on land, however, is formidable and costly. A spat over plans to build a wind farm off the coast Massachusetts' Cape Cod is playing out now, with state and local authorities arguing over a burying the electric cables needed to connect the farm to the power grid.

NASA's satellite maps reveal that the best areas to construct ocean wind farms are in the mid-latitude regions of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, including off the California coast.

To see an image of the QuikSCAT wind map, click here.

– Reporting by Jennifer Martinez

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2 COMMENTS SO FAR

July 11th, 2008 4:49 pm GMT

Even though the technology is here for relief from much of the dependence on foreign oil, until the owners of the infrastructure can make the bucks, the providers of the technology won't be able to deploy it. Big oil and big power will starve out the entreprenours until they can use their embedded base to pay for the distribution channels. It happenned with the telephone comnanies and video to the home. Watch it happen again with elctrical power, with hydrogen fuel, with solar power.

- Posted by Bob

July 12th, 2008 9:30 pm GMT

I really think we need to plant more crops and use oils that we get from plants. Many things can be made from h the cannabis plant. Plus it would give a boom the the farming industry. The sun, water, time and, God, it is the perfect Energy source and has a very short grow cycle.

- Posted by Chandler Bluesoul

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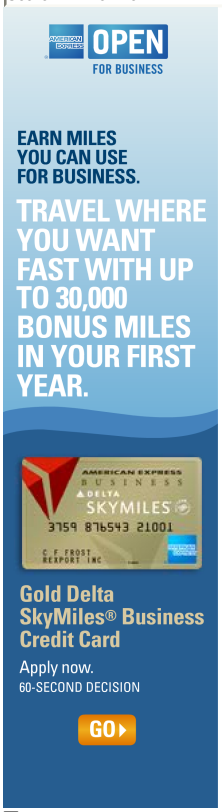

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