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NASA maps potential ocean areas for “green” wind power

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by William Atkins

Sunday, 13 July 2008

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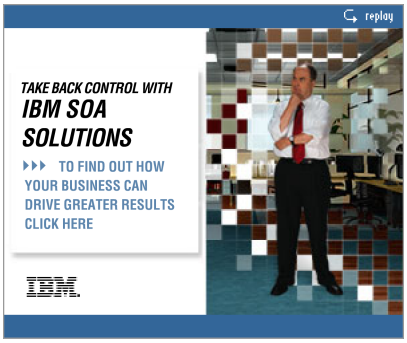
NASA scientists have been developing ocean maps for almost ten years using the NASA QuikSCAT satellite. The maps are now being used to find ocean areas where winds could produce an abundance of electrical energy.



QuikSCAT (or Quick Scatterometer), which was launched on June 19, 1999, is a low-earth-orbiting, sun-synchronous satellite that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) developed to measure wind speed, direction, and power over the world’s oceans.

The Earth-observing satellite is positioned at an altitude of 500 miles (800 kilometers) above the Earth’s surface and has a geocentric orbit, which means its altitude and inclination (98.6 degrees) has been coordinated so that it passes over the same point on the Earth’s surface at the same local solar time.

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The NASA maps generated by QuikSCAT have the potential to be used to develop and build offshore wind farms in order to convert wind energy into electrical energy.

Funded by NASA's Earth Science Division, the research results are published as an article inthe journal Geophysical Research Letters.

The GRL article is entitled “Wind power distribution over the ocean.” Its authors are W. Timothy Liu, Wenqing Tang, and Xiaosu Xie, all from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, U.S.A.

The abstract to the paper states, *“Probability distribution and power density of wind speed over global oceans are computed from eight years of QuikSCAT measurements. They describe the variation and higher moments of wind speed that are critical in relating the non-linear effects of wind on electric power generation capability, shipping hazard, and air-sea exchanges in heat, water, and greenhouse gases. The power density distribution confirms our general knowledge of atmospheric circulation related to mid-latitude storm tracks, trade winds, and monsoons. It also reveals regions of high wind power associated with flow distortion by land, wind channeled by land topography, and*

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