

EDITORIAL

The Downeast Mugging

As is their right, the professional Maine guides from Grand Lake Stream and other scenic, tradition-laden Downeast hamlets, have fought valiantly to fend off a variety of threats to their way of life. Whether it's alewife stocking in the St Croix watershed, closing the Grand Lake Stream fish hatchery, or the loss of camp lot leases. It's always something.

The latest round involves a plan by First Wind to spoil the Downeast vista with rows of big wind turbines, some of which, "are even taller than the mountains they destroy," wrote Gary Campbell, in a letter to the Maine Sportsman.

What is the value of majestic views of distant mountains and sunsets across sparkling, clear lakes? How do you quantify the worth of all of this Downeast outdoor grandeur? These are interesting questions, made all the more timely by the whole wind turbine debate. The late U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy, a liberal politician who championed alternative energy at every turn, turned out to be a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) when it came to erecting wind turbines within eye view of his beloved Cape Cod.

Granted, there is a certain subjectivity when it comes to humans placing worth on unhampered views of mountains and lakes. We all measure the worth of pristine scenery differently. In Gary Campbell's letter to the editor, he includes an excerpt from First Wind's

application with the Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) to erect wind turbines on Bowers Mountain. In defending their quest to erect wind turbines in scenic places, First Wind writes: *"Fishermen can orient their boats away from the turbines or situate themselves in one of the many coves if views of the turbines become undesirable. Or they may recreate at other nearby lakes with fewer views of turbines, if preferred."*

Are they serious? Can you think of a more grating arrogance?

The charitable conclusion about what motivates a corporation to indulge in such a grotesque, self-serving rationalization would be to say that the folks at First Wind just don't get it. After all, there are people to whom a scenic vista means nothing of any inherent value. Sometimes otherwise good men are blinded by the profit motive. Perhaps this is the case.

George Smith, a respected Maine outdoorsman and former head of SAM, recently slapped the Downeast guides across the face with a shockingly callous blog column titled, "Industrial sites, wind towers? Pah! Anglers go where the fish are."

In a nutshell, Smith argues that, in the angler's hierarchy of values, most of us care about just one thing: catching big fish. Smith writes, "Anglers pay big bucks to catch big fish. While it's nice if the river or lake is in a beautiful remote setting and not crowded

with other anglers, we go where the fish are."

Although I never have fished with Smith, I thought that I knew him. I would have surmised that a guy who purports to love the outdoors, who has a camp at Nesowadnehunk Lake, would place a greater value on "place" when he recreates outdoors. To write what he wrote at a time when thoughtful, respected guides like Dave Tobey and Steve Norris are fighting to preserve a livelihood and way of life, bespeaks a strident cynicism that is unbecoming a sportsman advocate of Smith's stature. As one angry critic asked Smith on his blog site, "How would you like a couple of wind turbines erected atop North and South Traveler Mountains in your beloved Baxter Park?"

Is this lapse in judgment all attributable to the proverbial "money trail"? Smith's critics think so. During the time that Smith was head of SAM, that organization accepted some significant dollars from First Wind. First Wind has also done some institutional advertising on Smith's blog site.

It seems to me that most of the men and women that I have shared a canoe or fishing boat with over the years all placed as much value on the scenery and quality of place as the size of the fish.