

A wind port belongs at Mack Point, not on Sears Island

by Rolf Olsen 12/21/2023



Mack Point and Sears Island. Credit: BDN Composite by Leela Stockley

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Rolf Olsen of Searsport is vice president of Friends of Sears Island, and he served on the Offshore Wind Port Advisory Group.

An online reader offered this comment to a [recent Bangor Daily News article about the proposed offshore wind port in Searsport](#): “Not one word about the Friends of Sears Island having made an agreement with the state acknowledging that their stewardship over PART of the island was contingent upon the remaining acres being available for economic development.” This, along with other comments I’ve heard recently, makes it clear that most people are not familiar with the contents of the [Sears Island Planning Initiative Consensus Agreement](#), dated April 12, 2007, submitted to then-Gov. John Baldacci the following month, and adopted by the Legislature.

This agreement was developed by a steering committee with more than 45 members, representing a wide variety of stakeholders, including two officers of a then-newly formed

nonprofit organization called Friends of Sears Island. The charge to this group was to “develop a set of recommendations for the use of Sears Island.” In the end, 38 steering committee members signed in favor of the agreement, four members were opposed, and five members’ votes were “unknown,” according to the tally. Many people who signed the agreement are still around and involved in this debate, 16 years later.

In fact, the agreement contains no expression of general support for using Sears Island for “economic development,” as suggested by the commenter. In broad terms, the agreement states that “appropriate uses for Mack Point and Sears Island are compatibly managed marine transportation, recreation, education and conservation.” The agreement also set the stage to divide Sears Island into the 601-acre conservation area (held by Maine Coast Heritage Trust), with the remaining 335 acres set aside “for a potential port development.”

The agreement lists 18 “uses and activities that are not appropriate for Sears Island,” including a prohibition against nuclear power plants, coal-fired power or industrial plants, casinos, unlawful destruction of wetlands or habitat, soil harvesting and more. The agreement further states that “Mack Point shall be given preference as an alternative to port development on Sears Island.” There are several references to “marine cargo port,” “cargo/container port,” or simply “port,” and it’s clear that the reserved land is intended to serve “marine transportation” purposes.

Based on the actual text of the agreement, I suggest that developing Sears Island for the wind port is inappropriate for a few reasons:

The Maine Department of Transportation [acknowledges](#) that a proposed wind port [could potentially be](#) located on Mack Point, where the 100-acre land requirement could be met, and Sprague Energy, owner of the port, [welcomes](#) the development. Sprague has, at their own expense, developed [marine engineering plans](#) that show how they can accommodate the port at Mack Point. According to [Sprague Vice President Jim Therriault](#), the port has 20 years of experience receiving, storing, and transporting blades, tower sections, nacelles and other components used to construct Maine’s land-based wind farms.

Does the proposed wind port serve Maine’s marine transportation needs? Many, including me, consider the wind port to be a manufacturing facility, where massive floating wind turbines that could tower more than 1,000 feet above the water, will be built and then towed to the deployment site in the Gulf of Maine to help the state meet its renewable energy goals.

It’s been suggested that Friends of Sears Island and others who signed the agreement should not now be protesting the development of the island for the wind port. Paragraph four of the agreement states “If any cargo/container port proposal is determined to meet applicable environmental standards, including an alternatives analysis which documents that the need could not be met elsewhere...” that no one would object to the development of a “cargo/container port on Sears Island.”

The wind port is not a cargo or container port, and so far, there has been no full environmental review completed and no permits issued, and the [alternatives analysis](#) shows that this need could be met on Mack Point.

There is currently no clearly documented reason to destroy 100 or more acres of forest, flatten the west side of the island, and fill 20 acres of Penobscot Bay for a wind port.