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Marine Policy Seminar

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A Criticism of NEPA Alternative Analysis and Wildlife Impacts of Electricity Generation

The National Environmental Policy Act requires projects in their Environmental Impact Statement to analyze potential alternatives to their proposed projects. However, most of these alternatives focus on different locations, or if the project is not undertaken at all. While these ensure that the individual project is not too environmentally damaging, it presents a false dichotomy for electricity producing projects. This because if one electricity project was not undertaken, then another type of electricity production will have to step up to meet the growing demand. I will focus on the proposal that NEPA alternative analysis for electricity production projects should include all other types of electricity to production. Thus, for an offshore wind project, some of the alternatives should be the environmental impact of coal, natural gas, nuclear, and other applicable energy sources. While some of the impacts of coal, natural gas, and nuclear are highly researched and are understood at some level, namely climate change and public health impacts, there needs to be more research into all environmental impacts for a complete "apples to apples" comparison to be appropriate. In this presentation I will focus on the current understanding of some other impacts of coal, such as acid mine drainage, impacts of fly ash, acid deposition, and impingement and entrainment. There will be discussion into how these environmental impacts should be compared or valued, and the complications of finding these numbers. Lastly, I will look into other policy implications for this research, such as the Production Tax Credit.