

Article 21C.

Permitting of Wind Energy Facilities.

**§ 143-215.115. Definitions.**

In addition to the definitions set forth in G.S. 143-212, the following definitions apply to this Article:

- (1) "Major military installation" means Fort Bragg, Pope Army Airfield, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, New River Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station, Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point, the United States Coast Guard Air Station at Elizabeth City, Naval Support Activity Northwest, Air Route Surveillance Radar (ARSR-4) at Fort Fisher, and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, in its own right and as the responsible entity for the Dare County Bombing Range, and any facility located within the State that is subject to the installations' oversight and control.
- (2) "Wind energy facility" means the turbines, accessory buildings, transmission facilities, and any other equipment necessary for the operation of the facility that cumulatively, with any other wind energy facility whose turbines are located within one-half mile of one another, have a rated capacity of one megawatt or more of energy.
- (3) "Wind energy facility expansion" means any activity that (i) adds or substantially modifies turbines or transmission facilities, including increasing the height of such equipment, over that which was initially permitted or (ii) increases the footprint of the wind energy facility over that which was initially permitted. (2013-51, s. 1.)

**§ 143-215.116. Permit to site wind energy facilities.**

No person shall undertake construction, operation, or expansion activities associated with a wind energy facility in this State without first obtaining a permit from the Department. (2013-51, s. 1.)

**§ 143-215.117. Permit preapplication site evaluation meeting; notice; preapplication package requirements.**

(a) Permit Preapplication Site Evaluation Meeting. – No less than 180 days prior to filing an application for a permit to construct, operate, or expand a wind energy facility, a person shall request a preapplication site evaluation meeting to be held between the applicant and the Department. The preapplication site evaluation meeting shall be held no less than 120 days prior to filing an application for a permit to construct, operate, or expand a wind energy facility and may be used by the participants to:

- (1) Conduct a preliminary evaluation of the site or sites for the proposed wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion. The preliminary evaluation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion shall determine if the site or sites:
  - a. Pose serious risk to civil air navigation or military air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, special-use air space, radar, or other potentially affected military operations.
  - b. Pose serious risk to natural resources and uses, including to species of concern or their habitats.

- (2) Identify areas where proposed construction or expansion activities pose minimal risk of interference with civil air navigation or military air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, special-use air space, radar, or other potentially affected military operations.
- (3) Identify areas where proposed construction or expansion activities pose minimal risk to natural resources and uses, including avian, bat, and endangered and threatened species.

(b) Permit Preapplication Package. – No less than 45 days prior to the date of the permit preapplication site evaluation meeting scheduled in accordance with subsection (a) of this section, the applicant for a wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion shall submit a preapplication package to the Department. To the extent that any documents contain trade secrets or confidential business information, those portions of the documents shall not be subject to disclosure under the North Carolina Public Records Act. The preapplication package shall include all of the following:

- (1) A narrative description of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion, including (i) the approximate number, type, and height of wind turbines to be constructed; (ii) the total planned capacity of the facility; and (iii) a description of any ancillary facilities.
- (2) A map showing the approximate location of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion.
- (3) A description of any known potential impacts of the proposed wind energy project location on civil air navigation or military air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, special-use air space, radar, or other potentially affected military operations. The applicant may use data made available by the Department pursuant to G.S. 143-215.123 to satisfy this requirement.
- (4) A description of species of concern, habitats that support species of concern, critical areas of wildlife congregation, and protected lands, as those species, habitats, and critical areas are referenced in the March 23, 2012, United States Fish and Wildlife Service Land-Based Wind Energy Guidelines (OMB Control No. 1018-0148) that are or believed to be present at the site of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion. The applicant may use data made available by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the Department, or other governmental agency to satisfy this requirement.
- (5) A list of the federal, State, and local agencies from which approvals will be obtained and the name of those approvals required in order to authorize the construction, operation, or expansion of the proposed wind energy facility.
- (6) A schedule showing the anticipated dates for commencement of construction, testing, and commercial operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion.

(c) Notice to Interested Parties. – No less than 21 days prior to the date of the permit preapplication site evaluation meeting scheduled in accordance with subsection (a) of this section, the Department shall provide written notice of the meeting to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the commanding military officer or the commanding military officer's designee of

any potentially affected major military installation, and any other party that the Department deems relevant. The notice shall include an invitation to participate in the permit preapplication site evaluation meeting. (2013-51, s. 1.)

**§ 143-215.118. Permit application scoping meeting and notice.**

(a) Scoping Meeting. – No less than 60 days prior to filing an application for a permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion, the applicant shall request the scheduling of a scoping meeting between the applicant and the Department. The scoping meeting shall be held no less than 30 days prior to filing an application for a permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion. The applicant and the Department shall review the permit for the proposed wind energy facility or proposed facility expansion at the scoping meeting.

(b) Notice of Scoping Meeting. – No less than 21 days prior to the scheduled permit application scoping meeting with an applicant, the Department shall provide written notice of the meeting to the commanding military officer of each major military installation, or the commanding military officer's designee, the Federal Aviation Administration, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the board of commissioners for each county and the governing body of each municipality in which the wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion is proposed to be located, and those local governments with jurisdictions over areas in which a major military installation is located. The notice shall include an invitation to participate in the scoping meeting. (2013-51, s. 1.)

**§ 143-215.119. Permit application requirements; fees; notice of receipt of completed permit; public hearing; public comment.**

(a) Permit Requirements. – A person applying for a permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion shall include all of the following in an application for the permit:

- (1) A narrative description of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion.
- (2) A map showing the location of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion that identifies the specific location of each turbine.
- (3) A copy of a deed, purchase agreement, lease agreement, or other legal instrument demonstrating the right to construct, expand, or otherwise develop a wind energy facility on the property.
- (4) Identification by name and address of property owners adjacent to the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion. The applicant shall notify every property owner identified pursuant to this subdivision by registered or certified mail or by any means authorized by G.S. 1A-1, Rule 4, in a form approved by the Department. The notice shall include all of the following:
  - a. The location of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion and the specific location of each turbine proposed to be located within one-half mile of the boundary of the adjacent property owner.

- b. A description of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion.
- (5) A description of civil air navigation or military air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, special-use air space, radar, or other military operations that may be affected by the construction or operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion.
  - (6) Documentation that addresses any potential adverse impact on military operations and readiness as identified by the Department of Defense Clearinghouse pursuant to Part 211 of Title 32 Code of Federal Regulations (July 1, 2012 edition) and any mitigation actions agreed to by the applicant.
  - (7) Documentation that the applicant has either (i) submitted Federal Aviation Administration Form 7460-1 for the turbines associated with the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion or (ii) initiated an informal review by the Department of Defense Siting Clearinghouse of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion. If the applicant has submitted Federal Aviation Administration Form 7460-1 in order to fulfill the requirements of this subdivision, the applicant shall provide any determination reached by the Federal Aviation Administration at the time the application is submitted to the Department. If the Federal Aviation Administration has not made a determination at the time the application is submitted to the Department, the application shall include a description of the status of the applicant's engagement with the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Defense Siting Clearinghouse.
  - (8) A study of the noise impacts of the turbines to be associated with the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion.
  - (9) A study on shadow flicker impacts of the turbines to be associated with the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion, unless the turbines will be located in a sound or in offshore waters.
  - (10) A study of the impact of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion on natural resources and uses, including avian, bat, and endangered and threatened species.
  - (11) An explanation of how the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would be consistent with the criteria in subsection (a) of G.S. 143-215.120.
  - (12) The application fee required by subsection (c) of this section.
  - (13) A plan regarding the action to be taken upon the decommissioning and removal of the wind energy facility. The plan shall include an estimate of the cost to decommission and remove the wind energy facility. The plan shall also include the anticipated life of the project, an estimate of the cost to decommission and remove the wind energy facility, a description of the manner in which the facility will be decommissioned, and a description of the expected condition of the site once the wind energy facility has been decommissioned and removed.
  - (14) Other data or information the Department may reasonably require.
- (b) Confidentiality of Trade Secrets and Business Information. – To the extent that any documents included in the permit application contain trade secrets or confidential business

information, those portions of the documents shall not be subject to disclosure under the North Carolina Public Records Act.

(c) Fees. – An applicant for a permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion under this section shall submit with the application required pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, an application fee of the lesser of (i) two hundred dollars (\$200.00) per megawatt of nameplate capacity for the proposed facility or (ii) fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000). The proceeds of this fee and the annual fee required by G.S. 143-215.125A shall be credited to a special fund within the Department and may be expended only for purposes authorized by this Article or necessary to carry out a duty imposed by this Article.

(d) Notice of Receipt of Complete Permit Application. – Within 10 days of receipt of a complete permit application for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion submitted pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Department shall provide notice of the permit application to (i) the commanding military officer of all major military installations, (ii) the commanding military officer of any military installation located outside the State that is located within 50 nautical miles of the location of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion, and (iii) the board of commissioners for each county and the governing body of each municipality in which the wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion is proposed to be located. The notice shall include:

- (1) A copy of the map showing the location of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion that includes the specific locations of wind turbines.
- (2) A written request to the commanding military officer of a major military installation or the commanding military officer's designee, for technical information related to any adverse impact on the installation's operations, training, or mission, including military air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, special-use air space, radar or other military operations that may be affected.
- (3) A written request for information related to potential adverse impacts of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion on local governments from the board of commissioners for each county and the governing body of each municipality.

(e) Provision of Permit Application to Affected Entities. – Except as provided by G.S. 143-215.124, within 10 days of receipt of a written request from the commanding military officer of any major military installation or the commanding military officer's designee, the board of commissioners for any county in which the site is proposed to be located or the governing body of any municipality in which the site is proposed to be located, the Department shall provide a copy of a permit application filed pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, in addition to any supplements, changes, or amendments to the permit application to the requesting commanding military officer or local government.

(f) Public Hearing and Comment. – The Department shall hold a public hearing in each county in which the wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion is proposed to be located within 75 days of receipt of a completed permit application. The Department shall provide notice including the time and location of the public hearing in a newspaper of general circulation in each applicable county. The notice of public hearing shall be published for at least two consecutive weeks beginning no less than 45 days prior to the scheduled date of the hearing. The notice shall provide that any comments on the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility

expansion should be submitted to the Department by a specified date, not less than 15 days from the date of the newspaper publication of the notice or 15 days after distribution of the mailed notice, whichever is later. No less than 30 days prior to the scheduled public hearing, the Department shall provide written notice of the hearing to:

- (1) The North Carolina Utilities Commission.
- (2) The Office of the Attorney General of North Carolina.
- (3) The commanding military officer of any potentially affected major military installation or the commanding military officer's designee.
- (4) The board of commissioners for each county and the governing body of each municipality with jurisdictions over areas in which a potentially affected major military installation is located. (2013-51, s. 1; 2023-134, s. 12.14(n).)

**§ 143-215.120. Criteria for permit approval; time frame; permit conditions; other approvals required.**

(a) Permit Approval. – The Department shall approve an application for a permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion unless the Department finds any one or more of the following:

- (1) Construction or operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would be inconsistent with or violate rules adopted by the Department or any other provision of law.
- (2) Construction or operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would encroach upon or would otherwise have a significant adverse impact on the mission, training, or operations of any major military installation or branch of military in North Carolina and result in a detriment to continued military presence in the State. In its evaluation, the Department may consider whether the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would cause interference with air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, or radar based on information submitted by the applicant pursuant to subdivisions (5) and (6) of subsection (a) of G.S. 143-215.119, and any information received by the Department pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (d) of G.S. 143-215.119.
- (3) Construction or operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would result in significant adverse impacts to ecological systems, natural resources, cultural sites, recreation areas, or historic sites of more than local significance; including national or State parks or forests, wilderness areas, historic sites, recreation areas, segments of the natural and scenic rivers system, wildlife refuges, preserves and management areas, areas that provide habitat for threatened or endangered species, primary nursery areas designated by the Marine Fisheries Commission and the Wildlife Resources Commission, and critical fisheries habitat identified pursuant to the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan.
- (4) Construction or operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would have a significant adverse impact on fish or wildlife.

- (5) Construction or operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would have a significant adverse impact on views from any State or national park, wilderness area, significant natural heritage area as compiled by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, or other public lands or private conservation lands designated or dedicated due to their high recreational values.
- (6) Construction or operation of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would obstruct major navigation channels or create a significant obstacle to navigation in coastal waters, as determined by the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the United States Coast Guard.
- (7) A permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would be denied under any other criteria set out in G.S. 113A-120.
- (8) Construction of the proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion would be prohibited under Article 14 of Chapter 113A of the General Statutes, the Mountain Ridge Protection Act of 1983.
- (9) The applicant is not in compliance with all applicable federal, State, or local permit requirements, licenses, or approvals, including local zoning requirements.

(b) Permit Decision. – The Department shall make a final decision on a permit application within 90 days following receipt of a completed application, except that the Department shall not be required to make a final decision until the Department has received a written "Determination of No Hazard to Air Navigation" issued by the Federal Aviation Administration pursuant to Subpart D of Part 77 of Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (January 1, 2012 edition). If the Department requests additional information following the receipt of a completed application, the Department shall make a final decision on a permit application within 30 days of receipt of the requested information. If the Department determines that an application for a wind energy facility or a wind energy facility expansion fails to meet the requirements for a permit under this section, the Department shall deny the application, and the application shall be returned to the applicant accompanied by a written statement of the reasons for the denial and any modifications to the permit application that would make the application acceptable. If the Department fails to act within the time period set forth in this subsection, the applicant may treat the failure to act as a denial of the permit and may challenge the denial as provided under Chapter 150B of the General Statutes.

(c) Permit Conditions. – The Department (i) may include as a condition of a permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion a requirement that the permit holder mitigate any adverse impacts and (ii) shall include as a condition of a permit for a proposed wind energy facility or proposed wind energy facility expansion a requirement that the permit holder obtain a written "Determination of No Hazard to Air Navigation" issued by the Federal Aviation Administration pursuant to Subpart D of Part 77 of Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (January 1, 2012 edition) for the facility. No permit for a wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion shall become effective until the Department has received and reviewed the "Determination of No Hazard to Air Navigation" issued by the Federal Aviation Administration for the facility. If the specific location of a turbine authorized to be constructed pursuant to a "Determination of No Hazard to Air Navigation" or the configuration of the wind energy facility varies from the information submitted by the applicant upon which the Department has made its permit decision, the Department may reevaluate the permit application and require the applicant to

submit any additional information the Department deems necessary to approve or deny a permit for the facility as reconfigured.

(d) Other Approvals Required. – The issuance of a permit under this section shall not obviate the need for the applicant to obtain any and all other applicable local, State, or federal permits, licenses, or approvals. Furthermore, nothing in this Article shall be interpreted to limit, as applicable, (i) the application of Article 7 of Chapter 113A of the General Statutes to facilities permitted under this section, including the permitting requirements of G.S. 113A-118, (ii) the ability of a city or county to plan for and regulate the siting of a wind energy facility in accordance with land-use regulations authorized under Chapter 160A and Chapter 153A of the General Statutes, or (iii) the applicable requirements of Chapter 62 of the General Statutes. (2013-51, s. 1.)

#### **§ 143-215.121. Financial assurance requirements.**

The applicant for a permit or a permit holder for a wind energy facility shall establish financial assurance that will ensure that sufficient funds are available for decommissioning of the facility and reclamation of the property to its condition prior to commencement of activities on the site, even if the applicant or permit holder becomes insolvent or ceases to reside in, be incorporated, do business, or maintain assets in the State. To establish sufficient availability of funds under this section, the applicant for a permit or a permit holder for a wind energy facility may use insurance, financial tests, third-party guarantees by persons who can pass the financial test, guarantees by corporate parents who can pass the financial test, irrevocable letters of credit, trusts, surety bonds, or any other financial device, or any combination of the foregoing, shown to provide protection equivalent to the financial protection that would be provided by insurance if insurance were the only mechanism used. (2013-51, s. 1.)

#### **§ 143-215.122. Monitoring and reporting.**

The applicant shall annually submit copies to the Department of any post-construction monitoring, such as reports on the impacts on wildlife in the location of and in the area proximate to the wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion and any impacts on military operations that are required by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the North Carolina Utilities Commission, or any other government agency. (2013-51, s. 1.)

#### **§ 143-215.123. Annual review of military presence.**

The Department shall consult with representatives of the major military installations to review information regarding military air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, special-use air space, radar, or other potentially affected military operations at least once per year. The Department shall provide relevant information on civil air navigation or military air navigation routes, air traffic control areas, military training routes, special-use air space, radar, or other potentially affected military operations to permit applicants as requested. (2013-51, s. 1.)

#### **§ 143-215.124. Record keeping.**

The Department shall serve as the custodian of all data, information, and records received from a permit applicant or a major military installation pursuant to this Article and shall ensure that information provided to the Department that constitutes trade secrets, as that term is defined in G.S. 66-152, and that is designated as confidential or as a trade secret under G.S. 132-1.2, is limited only to the Department, State employees, and other persons who have executed a confidentiality



agreement with the owner of such information. Information designated as confidential or as a trade secret under G.S. 132-1.2 shall not be subject to disclosure pursuant to G.S. 132-6. (2013-51, s. 1.)

**§ 143-215.125. Rule making.**

The Environmental Management Commission shall adopt any rules necessary for the implementation of this Article. In adopting rules, the Commission shall consult with the Coastal Resources Commission to ensure that the development of statewide permitting requirements is consistent with and in consideration of the characteristics unique to the coastal area of the State to the maximum extent practicable. (2013-51, s. 1.)

**§ 143-215.125A. Annual fee.**

The Department shall charge permittees an annual fee of seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) per permitted megawatt of capacity payable on or before September 1 for the previous fiscal year to be applied to the costs of administering this Article. The Department may charge a late fee of seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) per month per permit for every month or partial month that payment of the annual operating fee is delinquent. (2023-134, s. 12.14(o).)

**§ 143-215.126. Civil penalties.**

(a) The Secretary of Environmental Quality may impose an administrative penalty on a person who constructs a wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion without obtaining a permit under this Article or who constructs or operates a wind energy facility in violation of its permit terms and conditions. Each day of a continuing violation shall constitute a separate violation. The penalty shall not exceed ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) per day.

(b) The Secretary of Environmental Quality, irrespective of all other remedies at law, may institute an action for injunctive relief against a person who constructs a wind energy facility without first obtaining a permit under this Article or who constructs or operates a wind energy facility or wind energy facility expansion in violation of its permit terms and conditions. (2013-51, s. 1; 2015-241, s. 14.30(v).)