



SOUND STRATEGY

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIT NOBLE

After defeating Cape Wind, a coalition now seeks to protect Nantucket Sound for eternity

For well over a decade, Nantucket Sound was embroiled in a contentious environmental tug of war. On one side was Cape Wind, a \$2.6 billion project to erect a sprawling wind farm dotting twenty-five miles of Nantucket Sound. On the other was the Alliance to Protect Our Sound, a nonprofit organization fighting to thwart this project and preserve Nantucket Sound's natural environment. The debate presented an identity crisis of sorts for the environmental movement. Cape Wind claimed to be heralding in the future of green energy, while the Alliance, which garnered powerful support from the likes of the late Senator Ted Kennedy and Secretary of State John Kerry, argued that the wind farm would come at the cost of an entire marine ecosystem.

Ultimately, after sixteen years of lawsuits, protests, EPA studies, town hall meetings and even a Supreme Court case, Cape Wind terminated its wind farm before it got up and spinning. As for the Alliance to Protect Our Sound, they only became more energized.

“Our mission has always been long-term preservation of Nantucket Sound,” said Audra Parker, who has served as the president and CEO of the Alliance to Pro-

tect Our Sound since 2003. “After Cape Wind, we were able to devote all of our resources to permanent protection.” With a Master’s in Science from MIT and a bachelor’s in applied mathematics and economics from Brown, Parker was the mastermind behind the campaign against Cape Wind. “Nantucket Sound is unique from an economic, historic and environmental standpoint,” Parker said. “It is worthy of recognition and permanent protection.” To

that end, Parker now leads a coalition of environmentalists, lawmakers, fishermen, indigenous people, and hundreds of stakeholders in seeking to protect Nantucket Sound indefinitely by establishing the body of water as a National Historic Landmark.

This idea first took root back in 2010, some seven years into the battle with Cape Wind, when the National Park Service deemed that Nantucket Sound was eligible to be listed as a Traditional Cultural Prop-



erty in the National Register of Historic Places. Nantucket Sound was once exposed grounds upon which indigenous people traveled, hunted and lived. Indeed, the Aquinnah Wampanoag and Mashpee Wampanoag Tribes, who originally pushed for this federal designation, continue to regard Nantucket Sound as hallowed religious ground. The 750 square miles of water and seabed are now home to a vibrant marine ecosystem. Add the hundreds of historic properties and landmarks that line Nantucket Sound's shorelines, from the Kennedy Compound to Nantucket's Historic District, and the National Park Service agreed that the body of water



Audra Parker

more than met the criteria as a Traditional Cultural Property.

“Nantucket Sound is the only ocean-based Traditional Cultural Property recognized by the Keeper of the National Register,” explained Parker. “Designation as a National Historic Landmark and further protection through federal legislation would make the Sound permanently off-limits to de-

velopment.” Key to this designation is that it would encompass federal waters that fall outside the protection of the state. While Massachusetts’ jurisdiction extends three miles out from its shoreline, Nantucket Sound is also made up of miles of federal water outside of the state’s control. As was the case with Cape Wind, these federal waters are vulnerable for energy contracts negotiated by the Federal Government.

With a growing appetite for rolling back environmental protections by the current administration, the Alliance’s campaign might be as important now as it was when facing Cape Wind. Last month, President Trump pledged to lift protections on the Atlantic Ocean’s only national monument. While opening up these five thousand miles of conservation water to commercial fishing will not directly impact the Alliance’s campaign to protect Nantucket Sound, it illustrates the tumultuous waters many green initiatives are navigating today.

The Alliance’s campaign has earned support from Governor Charlie Baker, who in a letter to Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Ed Markey and Congressman Bill Keating, urged for “legislative action to protect this unique and deserving marine environment.” However, with that letter sent exactly two years ago this July, the

Alliance has needed to continue to grow its coalition of stakeholders, and lobby for Congress to introduce this legislation. “We are hopeful that this will happen soon,” said Parker. “Once federal legislation is enacted, we will have protected Nantucket Sound forever.” **N**



Nantucket Sounds Boundaries

