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From the EDITOR

As if pulled by an invisible lure, bicyclists, parents with children and elderly couples came to the seaside overlook that warm September day to stare out at five wind turbines spinning three miles off the southeast coast of Block Island.

Just behind them on the grassy hillside, I and about 20 of my colleagues from East Coast Sea Grant programs sat listening to a social scientist and an island resident recently retired from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration describe what they've learned since the turbines began generating electricity. This fall marked the fifth anniversary of the Block Island Wind Farm, the first offshore turbine installation in this country.

But neither the rapt onlookers nor the Sea Grant group were interested so much in celebrating this milestone as in understanding what it means for the future. These five turbines are the forerunners of veritable cities of power-producing wire and steel towers on track to rise in the ocean waters off the East Coast over the next decade or so.

As federal and state regulators, commercial fishermen and coastal communities prepare for what's coming and air their hopes and concerns, the realities of the present can't be ignored. Just like prophets of old, scientists and environmentalists are calling attention to the damage already being done to us and the natural world by climate change, and the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions from fossil fuels to prevent catastrophe. They aren't so much predicting the future as they are making us aware of our need to change in the present.

What's needed is a new kind of relationship between humans and the Earth we depend on, one that accounts for the limitations of both. The British author Adam Nicholson, in his recent book *Life Between the Tides*, suggests that rethinking our primal attraction to the shore can open us to a healthy shift towards realizing ourselves as part of nature, rather than above or apart from it.

"We still go to the seaside for consolation and simplicity. Demands and anxieties seem to drop away there; things still are as they were when we were 10. The rock pools still beckon, the blennies and gobies [types of fish] still shimmer beneath us. But there are ironies in choosing the shore as a theater for reassurance. Even if its changes are dependable and rhythmic, it is thick with variability. A tidal coast is filled with that paradoxical quality: reliable unreliability, both closed and open-ended, both familiar and strange. Regularity toys with uncertainty there. Nothing is more predictable than the coming and going of the tide and yet nothing about it can be relied on: daily revelation and daily erasure, daily loss and daily acquisition."

In this issue, the stories look at different ways people and projects are responding to present challenges and looking to create a better future. Offshore wind projects promise to provide clean energy. Land conservation advocates are helping a dying forest to be reborn and setting an example for others to follow. Educator Tim Visel saw a need for marine trades and aquaculture programs in Connecticut schools and helped ensure new generations of coastal stewards are nurtured. The artist sTo Len turns trash and polluted water into art that sends gentle but persuasive messages about the need to care for the world around us. And the scientists leading the project on the proliferation of dangerous chemicals in the environment hope to make a dent in a big, complicated problem threatening our well-being. These are examples of the kinds of actions we can all emulate to bring about positive change.

As the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber said, *"The future stands in need of you in order to be born."*

Judy Benson



Visitors to Block Island view two of the turbines as the ferry approaches the dock in September. Photo: Judy Benson

Cover photo: One of the five turbines situated offshore from Block Island is seen from a vessel traveling close to the wind farm. Photo: Syma Ebbin