

FACT SHEET: Environmental Assessment for Rhode Island/Massachusetts Wind Energy Area

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has published an environmental assessment for commercial wind leases and site assessment activities on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

BOEM leadership is holding public information sessions to further engage stakeholders in the offshore wind leasing process and ensure that multiple use concerns and associated solutions are identified early in the leasing process. Details about the sessions scheduled for Narragansett, R.I., on July 16 and in New Bedford, Mass., on July 17 will be available on www.boem.gov.

On February 24, BOEM announced the identification of a Wind Energy Area (WEA) offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts, which comprises approximately 164,750 acres within the area of mutual interest identified by Rhode Island and Massachusetts in a Memorandum of Understanding between the two states in 2010.

Based on an extensive consultation process, BOEM narrowed the focus of the WEA by excluding certain high value fishing grounds. BOEM prepared an environmental assessment that considers the entire WEA for leasing and approval of site assessment plans as the proposed action under NEPA. The environmental assessment also considers alternatives to the proposed action that would exclude certain portions of the WEA from leasing based on impacts to right whales, visual resources and existing telecommunications cable(s).

BOEM will use this environmental assessment to inform future decisions in the WEA offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts and to review site assessment plans. If a lessee proposes a wind energy generation project on its lease, BOEM would prepare a separate site- and project-specific analysis under NEPA of its construction and operations plan, and provide additional opportunities for public involvement.

BOEM will consider public comments on the environmental assessment in determining whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact, or conduct additional analysis under NEPA.

The environmental assessment for the Rhode Island/Massachusetts WEA was developed in consultation with federal and state agencies and federally-recognized tribes and from input during public information meetings. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Coast Guard, State of Rhode Island, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the federally recognized Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Narragansett Indian Tribe and Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) were cooperating agencies in the preparation of the environmental assessment.

A Notice of Availability of the environmental assessment is available in the Federal Register and online at <http://www.boem.gov/Renewable-Energy-Program/Smart-from->

July 2, 2012

the-Start/Index.aspx. The bureau is seeking public input on the environmental assessment with a deadline of August 2.

In November 2010, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar launched the “Smart from the Start” wind energy initiative for the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf to facilitate the siting, leasing and construction of new projects. A critical piece of “Smart from the Start” included the identification of Wind Energy Areas, done in consultation with BOEM’s intergovernmental renewable energy task forces and other federal agencies, and the development of the environmental assessment to simplify the leasing process.

Secretary Salazar [launched](#) the competitive leasing process for the Rhode Island/Massachusetts Wind Energy Area with a Call for Information and Nominations in August 2011 that invited developers to identify locations within the area of mutual interest in which they seek commercial leases for wind projects.

BOEM also sought public comment — through both the Call and a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment — on important issues and reasonable alternatives related to the proposed leasing, site characterization and assessment activities in the area under consideration. The public provided information about site conditions, resources and multiple uses in the Call area that assisted BOEM in reducing or eliminating obvious conflicts and defining the Wind Energy Area ultimately identified for consideration for future commercial leasing.

Additional information on the Wind Energy Area, including a map of the area, is available at: <http://www.boem.gov/Renewable-Energy-Program/State-Activities/Rhode-Island.aspx>.