

OFFSHORE

BOEM's Renewable Energy Program

A compelling future awaits offshore wind in the United States.

By Jim Bennett

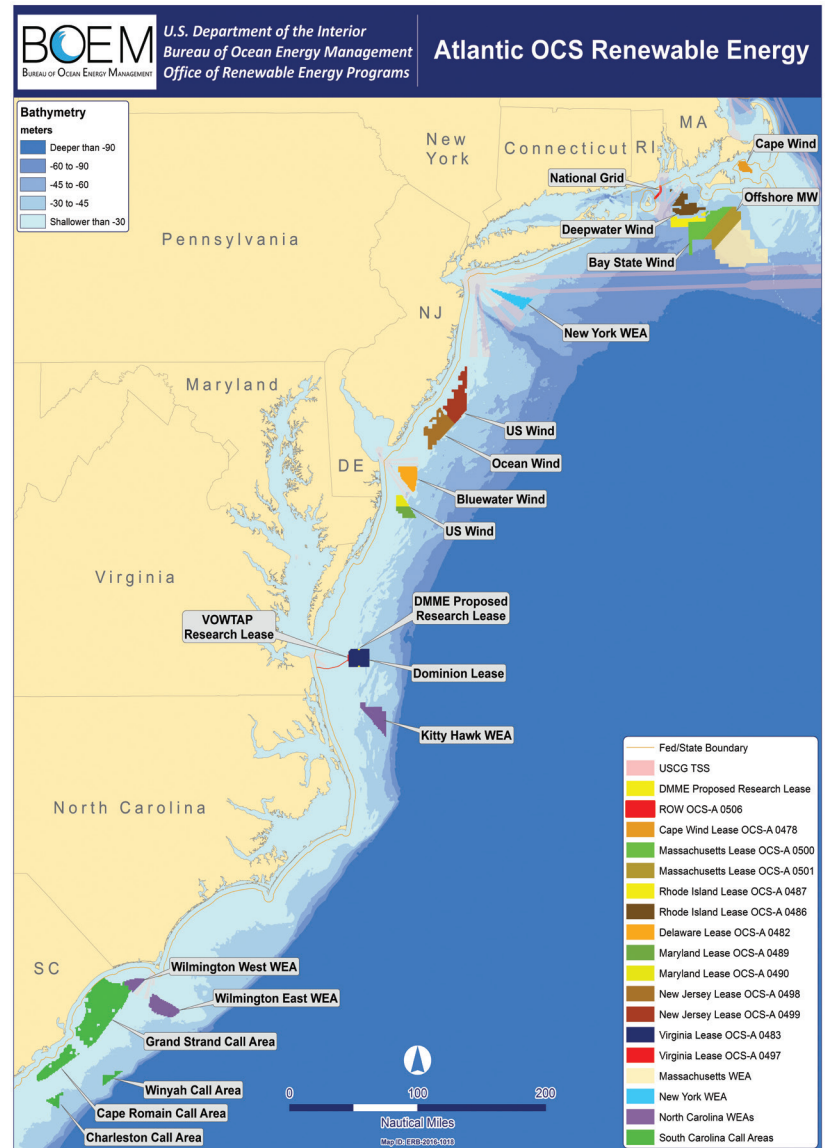
Renewable energy is of critical importance to the nation's security, economy, and environment. Commercial wind energy is no longer simply an aspirational vision for a sustainable energy future. It is a reality onshore and is becoming a reality offshore.

The Block Island Wind Farm in Rhode Island waters will be the United States' first offshore wind facility. This offshore project may set the stage for a long-awaited and even more expansive development of wind-energy facilities on the federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). Because offshore wind is an abundant source of environmentally friendly domestic energy, it is well-positioned to contribute to the economic growth and energy independence of the nation.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), through the passage of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, has the responsibility to oversee renewable energy development on the OCS by granting leases, easements, and rights-of-way for such projects. The Energy Policy Act requires that BOEM ensure offshore renewable energy activities are carried out in a safe and environmentally responsible manner that provides a fair return to the United States for the use of the OCS.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

On April 22, 2009, BOEM published the regulatory framework to govern the OCS renewable energy program. Since that time, BOEM has established Intergovernmental



Renewable Energy Task Forces, identified wind-energy areas off seven states, and awarded wind-energy leases off the Atlantic coast covering more than 1 million acres.

BOEM now has 11 leases along the East Coast for the development

of commercial-scale wind facilities on the OCS. In addition, BOEM anticipates conducting a lease auction by the end of the year for a wind-energy area offshore New York, and early next year BOEM expects to see a lease option for a

wind-energy area offshore North Carolina (Kitty Hawk). With these leases in place, every state adjacent to the OCS from Massachusetts to North Carolina will have at least one area available for commercial wind-farm development.

In the past year, interest in offshore wind energy has emerged in the Pacific Ocean. This includes an unsolicited proposal for a wind farm off the coast of California as well as three offshore Hawaii. Recently, the state of California has joined with BOEM to put together an Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force to develop offshore wind resources.

To date, BOEM has established 11 Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Forces in the Atlantic and two in the Pacific. These task forces include federal and state agencies, local governments, and federally recognized tribes to promote open dialogue and data sharing and ensure concerns are identified as early as possible to eliminate or reduce potential environmental and multiple-use conflicts.

BOEM engages its Task Forces through its planning, leasing, and plan-review procedures to discuss important topics such as Wind Energy Area (WEA) delineation, auction processes, planning and operations oversight, environmental compliance and safety monitoring, and decommissioning of facilities.

REVIEWING PLAN

With a number of leases in the Atlantic now in the hands of industry, BOEM has been actively reviewing lessees' plans for offshore site-characterization surveys and wind-resource assessment activities. Those results will be incorporated into future construction and operations plans.

Ensuring that renewable energy resources are developed in a re-

sponsible manner is a priority for BOEM. BOEM's Environmental Studies Program provides support for this effort by funding studies that compile available information, identify knowledge gaps, and analyze potential impacts to natural and cultural resources from offshore renewable energy development.

One such study, Real-time Opportunity for Development Environmental Observations (RODEO), looks at the environmental impacts of commercial wind-energy facilities in real time in order to benefit future development. BOEM anticipates releasing the initial results of RODEO in 2017.

MAJOR MILESTONES

BOEM has accomplished major milestones in the years since President Barack Obama's 2009 announcement, and it has more to look forward to.

Most recently:

- In May, the U.S. took an important step toward increasing the use of offshore wind resources. Building on ongoing talks between the United States and Denmark regarding offshore wind, BOEM, on behalf of the United States, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the government of Denmark to strengthen cooperation and information-sharing on wind energy. The MOU promotes information sharing, best practices, and policy initiatives to support the development and regulation of offshore wind-energy resources.
- In June, BOEM announced that it plans to hold a lease sale for 81,130 acres offshore New York for commercial wind-energy leasing later this year.
- Also in June, in consultation with the Hawaii Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force,

BOEM issued a Call for Information and Nominations to gauge the offshore wind industry's interest in acquiring commercial wind leases in two areas spanning about 485,000 acres of submerged lands in federal waters offshore Oahu.

- In August, BOEM announced a Proposed Sale Notice and Request for Interest for commercial leasing of about 122,405 acres offshore North Carolina (Kitty Hawk) as well as a Request for Information regarding potential wind-energy leasing offshore California.

Such milestones will help ensure the U.S. will have a bright renewable energy future. Of course, this future will require more than just BOEM. As an organization, BOEM looks forward to working closely with federal, state, local, and tribal partners to make this future a reality, while ensuring all uses (e.g., commercial fishing, vessel traffic, critical habitat areas) are also properly considered.

BOEM will be relying heavily on industry, environmental organizations, and other members of the public to provide it with important information for existing and upcoming offshore wind projects and related planning efforts. Such input will be carefully considered by all levels of leadership as BOEM works to achieve its mission to ensure responsible renewable energy development on the OCS.

From the inception of the federal OCS Renewable Energy Program, the forecast for offshore renewable energy activities has been optimistic. Now, with a clearly defined leasing-and-review process in place, appropriate technology available, favorable economics, leases in hand, and actual steel in the water, the U.S. is turning that corner at last. ↙