Offshore wind power is an exciting new frontier for American energy production, where technological advances, business opportunities, and policy are converging to unlock a reliable natural resource. Offshore wind will bring thousands of highly-skilled U.S. jobs, strengthen coastal economies, and deliver vast amounts of reliable, clean energy to America’s largest population centers.

America’s first offshore wind farm came online in 2016 in Rhode Island state waters. As of January 2020, there are 15 active commercial lease areas for offshore wind development in federal waters, with more in the works. Interested parties, including members of the general public, industries, all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions, have numerous opportunities to provide feedback throughout the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management ("BOEM") regulatory process. Public participation from other ocean users, including the fishing industry and coastal communities, is essential to help the United States fully realize the benefits of offshore wind power.

This guide is meant to draw attention to the opportunities for public comment in BOEM’s regulatory process for commercial offshore wind development to ensure an American offshore wind industry that works for coastal communities, traditional ocean industries, and U.S. national security interests.

The Offshore Wind Sector’s Commitment to Public Engagement

The emerging U.S. offshore wind industry, the U.S. fishing industry, other ocean users, and coastal communities can benefit by working side-by-side, adding diversity and strength to the American Blue Economy. Offshore wind developers will continue to seek out and respond to feedback from the communities in which they develop and operate.

Public participation in the offshore wind development process is critical, especially during the process of identifying potential opportunities for future offshore wind development. While this guide outlines the public participation opportunities throughout the BOEM regulatory process for offshore wind development, interested parties may also provide input to regional fisheries management councils, state permitting processes, and state fisheries, habitat, and environmental working groups, among others. The offshore wind industry is also committed to going above and beyond what is outlined in this guide to provide opportunities for public participation. For example, offshore wind developers have collectively held thousands of volunteer meetings with other ocean users, like fishermen, fishing groups, and coastal communities, and the industry continues to look for ways to expand engagement. Early feedback from interested parties helps inform offshore wind development. Developers encourage interested parties to provide feedback to BOEM throughout the process and directly to developers once they gain site control.

The Offshore Wind Public Participation Guide

About the American Clean Power Association (ACP):
American Clean Power is the voice of companies from across the clean power sector that are powering American future, providing cost-effective solutions to the climate crisis while creating jobs, stimulating investment in the U.S. economy and driving high-tech innovation across the nation. We are uniting the power of America’s renewable energy industry to advance our shared goals and to transform the U.S. power grid to a low-cost, reliable and renewable power system.

More information about the offshore wind leasing process and public participation opportunities can be found in the following resources:

- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
- BOEM Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships: https://www.boem.gov/Stakeholder-Engagement-and-Partnerships

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Special Initiative on Offshore Wind

About the Special Initiative on Offshore Wind: The Special Initiative on Offshore Wind is an independent project at the University of Delaware’s College of Earth, Oceans and Environment that supports the advancement of offshore wind as part of a comprehensive solution to the most pressing energy problems facing the United States. The Special Initiative on Offshore Wind provides expertise, analysis, information sharing, and strategic partnership with industry, advocacy and government stakeholders to build understanding and drive the deployment of offshore wind.

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Public Participation Road Map for Commercial Offshore Wind Development in Federal Waters

How Are Offshore Wind Farms Sited?

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management ("BOEM") works with interested parties to identify potential areas for offshore wind development on the Outer Continental Shelf ("OCS") that is all submerged lands lying seaward of state coastal waters that are under U.S. jurisdiction. To ensure the process is as complete and transparent as possible, BOEM solicits public comments, conducts Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Forces ("Task Forces") with interested states, and holds public meetings throughout the offshore wind development process. Outside of these opportunities, BOEM has an open- door policy to all stakeholders from the public and receive all available information in order to ensure it will make the most informed decisions possible.

The offshore wind development process starts when BOEM determines interest either from a state, through a Governor's request that BOEM establish a Task Force and hold meetings, or determines interest either from a state, through a Governor's request that BOEM establish a Task Force and hold meetings, or determines interest either from a state, through a Governor's request that BOEM establish a Task Force and hold meetings, or determines interest either from a state, through a Governor's request that BOEM establish a Task Force and hold meetings, or determines interest either from a state, through a Governor's request that BOEM establish a Task Force and hold meetings. An EA also documents the potential environmental impacts of proposals that do not require an EIS and identifies as early as possible potential areas for offshore wind development.

•  Environmental Assessments ("EAs"): An EA is a summary of the information that BOEM collects about the proposed location for offshore wind development. During the preparation of an EA, BOEM consults with the public on site conditions, resources, and multiple uses in close proximity to or within the area that might be affected by the project. An EA is similar to a report card of the OCS that appear most suitable for commercial wind energy activities, while presenting the fewest apparent environmental impacts to marine life and ecosystems. Any significant impacts identified in an EA must be analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement ("EIS").

•  Formal Comment Periods: These comment periods serve to inform BOEM of interest in leasing a particular site on the OCS. Rather than receive an unsolicited lease request, BOEM issues a Request for Interest ("RFI") to identify potential areas for offshore wind development in federal waters. An unsolicited lease request is a submission received by BOEM that is not in response to a request for a lease.

BOEM is required by federal law to conduct a public scoping process called a "Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS in the Federal Register" that provides the public with the opportunity to learn about the proposed offshore wind development and offer comments. The public scoping process normally lasts 60-90 days, and comments must be filed before the specified deadlines. Formal Comment Periods end during formal comment periods will become the official public record.

Visit https://www.boem.gov/submitting-comments/ to see current and upcoming opportunities to comment on BOEM regulatory processes, including offshore wind, oil and gas, and other activities under BOEM jurisdiction.

Your Feedback Makes a Difference

Taking time to provide BOEM with feedback helps ensure that offshore wind development reduces multiple user conflicts. After incorporating extensive public feedback from the Call, BOEM identifies Wind Energy Areas ("WEAs") and identifies parts of the OCS that appear most suitable for commercial wind energy activities, while presenting the fewest apparent environmental impacts to marine life and ecosystems. These WEAs are generally smaller than Call Areas because they incorporate feedback from interested parties, including state and federal agencies and other user groups, such as fishing and commercial shipping industries.

What Happens If There Is an Unsolicited Lease Request?

Unsolicited lease requests are another way that BOEM works with interested parties to identify potential areas for offshore wind development in federal waters. An unsolicited lease request is a submission received by BOEM that is not in response to a request for a lease. When BOEM receives an unsolicited lease request, it is given to the appropriate Task Force for review.


Unsolicited lease requests provide an avenue for developers to seek a federal lease for the development of renewable energy projects. Following an unsolicited lease request, BOEM issues a Request for Information ("RFI") to determine whether or not competitive processes are necessary. Importantly, receipt of an unsolicited lease request by BOEM is the earliest step in the public engagement process. Public meetings are ordinarily convened in the state where the project is located. Public meetings help ensure that offshore wind development reduces multiple user conflicts. After incorporating extensive public feedback from the Call, BOEM identifies Wind Energy Areas ("WEAs") and identifies parts of the OCS that appear most suitable for commercial wind energy activities, while presenting the fewest apparent environmental impacts to marine life and ecosystems. Any significant impacts identified in an EA must be analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement ("EIS").

** Environmental Impact Statement ("EIS")**: Once a small area developer submits a formal Construction Operations Plan ("COP") to BOEM, the agency reviews the information that BOEM conducts a comprehensive, site-specific, and broad-ranging review of the proposal. BOEM determines whether the proposal is consistent with OCS management goals and objectives. This review will take place before the project is approved by BOEM. BOEM holds a public scoping process during which the public is invited to provide comments on the proposal. The scoping process is an opportunity for the public to provide comments on the proposal. The scoping process is an opportunity for the public to provide comments on the proposal. BOEM must hold one or more public hearings during the scoping process to hear from the public and learn about potential impacts of the project.

** Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Forces**: BOEM meets with its Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Forces ("Task Forces"), which bring together members of states, local, and tribal governments and federal agencies to discuss how to exchange data and information, and identify potential conflicts early in the project planning and lease process. These meetings are open to the public, who can provide comments.


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