

Ensuring Compatibility Between Offshore Wind and Military Readiness



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Introduction

The offshore wind industry recognizes that national security is paramount and is committed to working with national security stakeholders to ensure that all wind project development is compatible with military readiness. The primary avenue by which industry works with the Department of Defense (DoD) to address national security concerns about potential wind projects, both on- and offshore, is through the [DoD Military Aviation and Installation Assurance Siting Clearinghouse](#) (“Clearinghouse”).



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Background

The Clearinghouse was established in the Fiscal Year 2011 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and acts as a single point of contact for Federal agencies, State and local governments and to facilitate DoD reviews of proposed energy and transmission projects to ensure they do not impinge on national security interests. The Clearinghouse manages [the Mission Compatibility Evaluation \(MCE\) Process](#), a [timely, transparent, mission-specific, project-specific, and science-based analysis of potential impacts to military operations](#). The process secures the input of military stakeholders from individual military bases to Pentagon-level military commands and services on proposed energy and transmission projects. **Analysis is done on potential impacts to military operations, research, development, testing, training, and readiness. DoD considers potential impacts to radars, low-level flight routes and training areas, and vessel navigation, among other issues.** The Clearinghouse consolidates the DoD input and provides the official DoD position to Federal agencies, state and local permitting authorities, and project proponents.

Clearinghouse Coordination with BOEM

For land-based projects and offshore projects out to 12 nautical miles (nm) from shore, the formal Clearinghouse review process occurs when a developer [files for its project permits with the Federal Aviation Administration](#). For projects on the Outer Continental Shelf (i.e. beyond 12 nm), which is where the offshore wind projects in development today are located, the [review process with DoD](#) is embedded from the start. Clearinghouse coordination with the Bureau of Offshore Energy Management (BOEM) begins as potential lease areas are identified, through their finalization. Once a lease is awarded to a developer [project specific reviews are initiated to ensure specifications continue to be compatible with any military activities and assets](#).

Role of Clearinghouse in OSW

From its inception in 2011 through the end of 2020, the Clearinghouse has conducted more than 35,000 reviews—the majority of which were reviews of onshore wind turbines. During Clearinghouse review, if a military branch or base identifies potential concerns with a wind energy project, the Clearinghouse will act as the liaison between the project and military entity to facilitate mitigation discussions.

Conversations between developers and the Clearinghouse have resulted in project developers making changes to their projects, DoD deploying technical mitigations paid for by industry, and in some cases even abandoning projects when a compromise with DoD has not been feasible—though most projects require limited to no mitigation conversations. To date, no projects have been built over the objection of DoD, and the Clearinghouse has brokered dozens of mitigation agreements with project proponents – more than 40 of which are [posted on the Clearinghouse website](#).

All active and proposed lease areas and offshore wind projects are thoroughly reviewed by DoD and BOEM to ensure compatibility with military needs. Focusing specifically on national security, Federal law allows DoD to raise concerns if a proposed energy project (individually or on a cumulative basis) may have any adverse impact on military operations and readiness, defined as adverse impacts to “flight operations, research, development, testing, and evaluation, and training that is demonstrable and is likely to impair or degrade the ability of the armed forces to perform their warfighting missions.” Given DoD’s extensive use of sea- and airspace over the Outer Continental Shelf offshore wind projects should expect careful evaluation of all nearby military activities.

DoD Involvement in BOEM Task Force Meetings

Led by the Clearinghouse, DoD entities participate in State Task Forces to help BOEM identify Wind Energy Areas and highlight any DoD stipulations that BOEM should include in its lease sale agreement with the project proponent. DoD will then remain engaged as a cooperating agency throughout project development, construction, and operation. For example, in May of 2021, BOEM issued its Record of Decision for the Vineyard Wind 1 Offshore Wind Energy Project marking the first ever utility-scale offshore wind farm approved for installation in federal waters.

The [Record of Decision](#) issued by BOEM incorporated mitigations approved by the Clearinghouse leading DoD to conclude the project would pose only “minor, but acceptable” impacts.

Recent DoD Recommendations

More recently, DoD has shared its [view on compatibility issues in the New York Bight](#), which has [led BOEM](#) to reduce the size of areas proposed for leasing and to consider additional adjustments and permit conditions going forward. Similarly, DoD was closely engaged in BOEM’s identification of the Kitty Hawk and Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind lease areas. Given that the Virginia and North Carolina coasts annually host thousands of sea and air training events from the shore to 150 miles out, these project areas prove how well the Clearinghouse collaborates with interagency partners to ensure military needs are compatible with offshore wind development.

The story is the same on the West Coast of the United States. There, DoD worked closely with BOEM and California officials to identify areas off the central and northern coasts of California ([Morro Bay 399](#) and [Humboldt](#), respectively) for offshore wind that were [announced](#) in May 2021.

The Process Works

The offshore wind industry is confident the existing DoD and BOEM review processes fully protect DoD interests and military readiness. As [stated](#) by Vice Admiral (retired) **Dennis V. McGinn, former Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations, and Environment and Commander of the Third Fleet**, in comments in the Vineyard Wind proceeding, the DoD review process is “thorough and is solely focused on what is needed to protect the military mission. In my experience, neither DoD nor the individual military services will sign-off on a proposed project that may pose a major impact to military testing, training, or operations.”



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