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'Historic' day for Humboldt County offshore wind project

Harbor district executive director Larry Oetker and Crowley VP Jeff Andreini sign a historic agreement to develop and operate a heavy lift terminal to support offshore wind off the coast of Humboldt County. (Ruth Schneider/The Times-Standard)

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Local and federal lawmakers and stakeholders in the proposed offshore wind project off the coast of Humboldt County celebrated a milestone Thursday afternoon, announcing a new partnership that will help prepare the port for the industry.

Crowley Wind Services, a company headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida, will serve as the developer of the heavy lift marine terminal on a 180-acre site on the Samoa Peninsula. The terminal is projected to be the second-largest in the United States once completed and will help with the manufacturing, installation and operation of the offshore wind platforms.

"This is a historic and transformational moment in the history of Humboldt County and the state of California," said Greg Dale, president of the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District board on Thursday afternoon on Woodley Island.

Harbor district executive director Larry Oetker and Crowley vice president Jeff Andreini signed a historic agreement between the two entities cementing future work to build the terminal and bring offshore wind energy to the North Coast.

"The port of Humboldt Bay now stands to be an international leader in the transition to renewable energy," Dale said. "The port will play a critical role not only in Humboldt Bay (and) in Morro Bay call areas but also in all future offshore wind areas as they are developed on the West Coast."

One highlight stressed by multiple leaders was the creation of jobs and the key role that will play in supporting the Humboldt County economy. "Within the next few years, this project will generate high-skill manufacturing and technical jobs, investments and clean energy that will extend for generations into the future," Dale said.

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman echoed Dale, noting the sustainability of offshore wind energy. "I expect this latest venture will provide many in Humboldt County, with not just dozens, not just hundreds, but thousands of good paying jobs in an industry with tons of potential," Huffman said. "It will improve our harbor in a way that will likely attract other businesses and ensure that Humboldt stays on the leading edge of addressing climate change."

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman speaks during a news conference on the historic step forward Humboldt County is making to support offshore wind. (Ruth Schneider/The Times-Standard)

Andreini called it a major milestone for Crowley as well as the industry. "I would say that the announcement here today, to operate and develop the Humboldt Bay offshore wind and heavy lift marine terminal along with the harbor district to support not only California but more importantly, the U.S. West Coast, is arguably the most significant achieved in our short history in offshore wind and potentially one of the most noteworthy announcements for offshore wind this year," he said.

California set a goal to create at least 2 to 5 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030. Once operational, the Humboldt offshore wind area could provide 1.6 gigawatts of energy, enough to power 1.6 million homes. The leases are expected to be auctioned in just a few weeks.

The Port of Humboldt Bay received a $10.45 million grant from the California Energy Commission to conduct technical studies and do the preliminary design. The port estimates permitting and design work will be completed by mid-2024.

"The confluence of port development and offshore wind is here," Huffman said. "And for years I have advocated for both of these things, but it is exciting to see them finally coming together in what is likely to be a huge windfall, no pun intended for Humboldt County."