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Offshore Wind

BOEM Launches Offshore Wind Actions for California, Gulf Coast, New York Blight

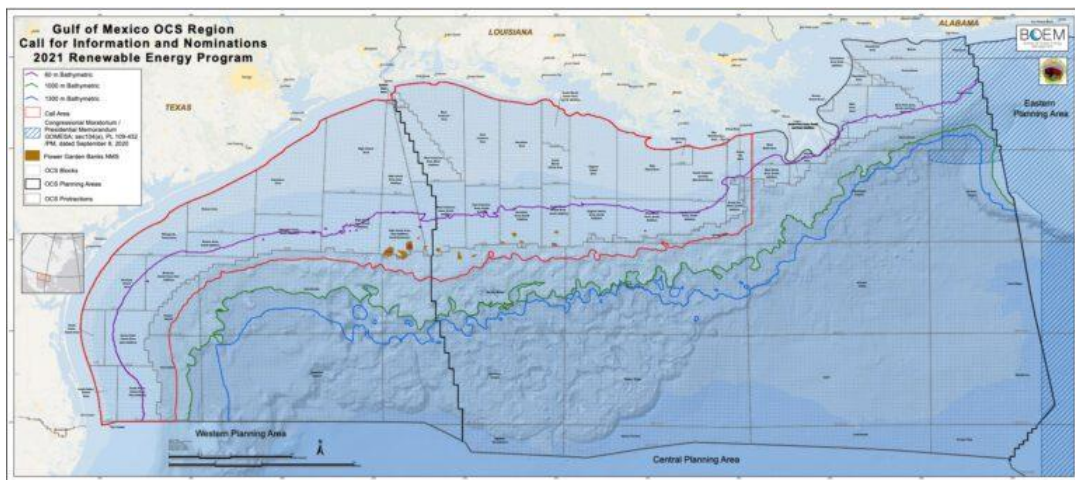
by Sonal Patel

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is pushing forward with offshore wind energy environmental assessments (EA) for coastal areas in California and the Gulf of Mexico. This week, it also set a wind auction date for the New York Blight, an area comprising more than 480,000 acres offshore New York and New Jersey.

The Department of Interior's (DOI's) BOEM on Jan. 11 released the draft EA for the Humboldt Wind Energy Area (WEA) off the northern California coast, initiating a 30-day public review and comment period. The 206-square-mile area on the Pacific Outer Continental Shelf could host 1.6 GW of new offshore wind power. The purpose of the action is "to issue up to 3 commercial renewable energy leases within the [wind energy areas (WEAs)] and grant rights-of-way (ROWs) and rights-of-use and easement (RUEs) in the region of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) of northern California," it noted. The agency said the draft EA considers "potential environmental impacts and socioeconomic effects from issuing offshore wind energy leases and related site characterization and assessment activities within the Humboldt WEA."

Also on Jan. 11, the agency stated its intent to prepare a draft EA for almost 30 million acres of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, just west of the Mississippi River to the Texas/Mexican border. The action "represents a culmination" of a collaboration between local, state, federal, and tribal governments to utilize "the best available science and traditional knowledge to minimize conflicts between ocean uses," the agency noted. Stakeholders comprise the Gulf of Mexico Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force, which first met last June and is planning to meet again in early 2022. BOEM also noted it was "preparing a draft EA on the call area now in order to be able to respond to future needs of the states and opportunities as technology develops for deeper waters and lower wind speeds."

BOEM's proposed Gulf of Mexico



call map. Source: BOEM

New York Blight: Most Areas Ever Offered in a Single Auction

On Jan. 12, DOI announced BOEM will hold an auction on Feb. 23 to allow offshore wind developers to bid on six lease areas in the New York Blight. Representing the most areas ever offered in a single auction, leases offered in the New York Blight sale could result in 5.6 GW to 7 GW of offshore wind, the DOI said.

BOEM said its recent actions respond to the Biden-Harris administration's goal to install 30 GW of offshore wind by 2030. The federal goal "is complemented by state offshore wind policies and actions throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic," it said.

Collectively, New York and New Jersey have set the nation's largest regional offshore wind target of installing more than 16 GW of offshore wind by 2035.

American Clean Power, a trade group that represents the renewables industry, has reported that U.S. states have established 40 GW of offshore wind procurement targets. “The U.S. now has a total offshore wind project pipeline of over 14,000 MW in federal lease areas issued to date. In addition, two offshore wind demonstration projects are planned for development in state waters off Ohio and Maine,” it said. “Project developers currently expect 12 offshore wind projects totaling 10,300 MW to be operational by 2026.”

So far, however, only two commercial projects have BOEM’s green light: the 800-MW Vineyard Wind 1 project offshore Massachusetts, and the 130-MW South Fork Wind project, offshore New York. BOEM said it expects to review at least 16 plans to construct and operate commercial offshore wind energy facilities by 2025, which would represent more than 22 GW of new offshore wind power for the U.S.

A Long Road Ahead?

The announcements predictably prompted mixed reactions from the power industry. Some hailed a potential for accelerated development. “It’s evident that offshore wind has the potential to provide clean, renewable energy to businesses and residences throughout the country, making the administration’s goal of generating 30 GW of power from offshore wind energy by 2030 achievable,” Anthony Allard, Head of North America for Hitachi Energy, told *POWER*. “Investing in renewable energy and efforts to make our electric grids more flexible and resilient is imperative to deliver on the promise of a carbon-neutral future, slow the pace of climate change, and mitigate extreme weather events. This planned sale will bring the U.S. one step closer to addressing the country’s need to increase renewable energy for a more sustainable future.”

Others, however, cautioned that the actions are just the first of many other steps. It’s “important to highlight that OCS renewable energy leases do not authorize any OCS activity, but instead only grant a lessee the exclusive right to submit plans for BOEM’s consideration,” noted attorneys at Hunton Andrews Kurth. “Leasing marks the beginning of a multi-year process that would provide additional opportunities for stakeholder participation.”

A successful lessee would need to submit a Site Assessment Plan (SAP) within the first year after lease issuance. The SAP would describe the initial activities necessary to assess siting a project within the lease area for commercial offshore wind development and the potential impacts of those proposed activities, the attorneys said.

“Only after BOEM approval of the SAP could a lessee begin activities assessing the site. A lessee would also need to submit a Construction and Operation Plan (COP) for BOEM approval, which would detail the construction and operation of the wind energy project on the lease. BOEM would then conduct additional environmental and technical reviews of the COP in deciding whether it could be approved, and construction could begin.”

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