RECHARGE

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Maine targets 3GW of floating wind and terminal in sweeping US Atlantic play

Maine Gov. Janet Mills. Photo: Getty/Portland Press Herald via Getty Images

Measure aims to decarbonise power supply while positioning the US Northeast state at the centre of giga-scale sector demand in the Gulf of Maine

By **Tim Ferry**

The US state of Maine passed a sweeping bill today (Wednesday) mandating 3GW of offshore wind capacity by 2040 while also setting the rules for developing an assembly and staging port intended to position it at the centre of regional giga-scale floating development.

The bill will now go to governor Janet Mills, an offshore wind supporter who is expected to sign it into law.

The act would require the state to hold its first solicitation no later than 1 June 2025 for at least 600MW of floating wind capacity, with successive rounds held within 24 months of each other.

Offtake contracts for at least 1GW must be signed by 1 February 2030 and a cumulative 2.8GW by that same date in 2035. The law would see the entire 3GW mandate fulfilled by 2040, enough to power 900,000 homes and supply half of the state's total electricity demand.

"To combat climate change and invest in Maine's energy independence, our state has set ambitious but necessary goals for renewable energy," said the bill's sponsor, state senator Mark Lawrence, a Democrat.

The consolidated bill includes separate measures governing development of a floating wind port at Searsport, some 52 miles (84 km) from the capital at Augusta.

The floating wind terminal bill had recently been the subject of **intense debate in the legislature** over efforts to promote union labour. Governor Mills demurred from signing it last month over concerns that Maine's low union membership would result in jobs going to out of state workers.

A compromise prioritises Maine workers for port and project development while ensuring that pay scales are agreed up through collective bargaining.

Gulf of Maine

The Gulf of Maine will be critical for **future industry growth in the Northeast** as states ramp demand on climate and renewable energy ambitions. Near-shore shallow water offshore wind acreage off Massachusetts and in the New York Bight has already mostly been gobbled up.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the federal regulator of energy development in US waters, recently **designated a wind energy 'call area'** across some 9.8 million acres (39,677 km2) of the Gulf of Maine waters holding around 119GW of potential capacity, but this will likely be winnowed down as the process advances.

The call area encompasses mostly deep water to 700 metres, and industry expects all development to be floating.

In contrast to its neighbours in southern New England region, Maine has taken a more cautious approach to the sector, as reflected in lengthier timeline for completion of capacity installation.

Massachusetts mandates 5.6GW contracted by 2027, while Rhode Island is aiming for 100% renewable energy – mostly offshore wind – by 2030.

"This bill will allow Maine and the broader US to become leaders in floating offshore wind technology," said Carol Oldham, northeast director for trade group Business Network for Offshore Wind.

“We encourage Maine to work closely with neighbouring states to develop the robust supply chain and port infrastructure necessary for these projects,” she added.

The state is piloting the **144MW New England Aqua Ventus (NEAV)** floating wind research array on coordination with the University of Maine (UMaine) and Mitsubishi-owned Diamond Offshore Wind (DOW).

The array will allow Maine “to address critical questions – such as on fishing and environmental impacts - prior to potential commercial development,” according to its website.

The 9,637-acre (39km2) research lease in 2021, is in federal waters some 23 miles (37 km) southeast of Portland.

BOEM recently issued its environmental assessment (EA) for the site, setting it up for a lease sale. Any project developed there will need to undergo a more thorough environmental impact statement.

A separate research project is also under development in state waters near Monhegan Island.

This project consists of a single turbine and is being developed by UMaine and DOW, but outside of permitting and other regulatory duties, does not directly involve the state.