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## Green Seas: ‘Huge opportunity’ as California no longer just dreaming of offshore wind

US interior secretary Deb Haaland (right) announced auctions of offshore wind off California on 18 October. Photo: US Department of the Interior



*Our environmental sustainability newsletter visits the Golden State, virtually at least, to find out whether the new gold rush can be found out at sea*

By **Eric Priante Martin** in Stamford

Eureka took its name from the exclamation that prospectors made upon discovery of gold, as the town played a role as a shipping hub when Northern California was a hot spot for mining the commodity in the 1800s.

Fast forward to 2022, and local officials were meeting to consider a deal aimed at positioning the city as a port for another potentially lucrative commodity: offshore wind.

Larry Oetker, executive director of the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District, addressed the port authority’s commissioners to explain why it was about to sign an agreement with Crowley Wind Services that would launch exclusive negotiations to develop a terminal to serve the offshore wind industry.

US interior secretary Deb Haaland had announced on 18 October that about two months later the federal government would auction offshore wind leases off California, with three of the five areas in Humboldt Bay, just miles off Eureka’s coast, less than two months later.

“That has basically created a flurry of activity within the offshore wind industry to really focus on the port of Humboldt Bay,” Oetker said, according to an audio recording of the meeting. That flurry is seen in the groundswell of interest in the five leases, two of which are in southern California’s Morro Bay.

California is aiming to have up to 5 GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030, as US President Joe Biden targets 30 GW by the same time frame. [The state is also gunning for 25 GW by 2045.](#)

Recharge, our sibling news service covering the renewables sector, [has reported that 43 developer consortia have lined up to participate in the bidding](#) for what could become 4.5 GW in generation capacity. That is more than double the players in the last big offshore wind auction off New York.

### There’s gold in them there winds

Tim Ferry, Recharge’s US offshore wind editor, said the areas off northern California see wind blowing at 10 metres per second compared to just eight or nine off Massachusetts, where offshore wind development is further along.

“It’s a huge opportunity. The resources are great,” he said of California. “But there are a number of challenges facing the state as it goes forward, and facing the country.”

Jeff Andreini (right), Crowley Wind Services’ vice president of new energy, signs a deal to launch exclusive negotiations to develop and operate an offshore wind port. The Humboldt Bay Offshore Wind Heavy Lift Marine Terminal is planned for Eureka, California. Photo: Crowley



Those challenges include deep water, which means that, unlike the US East Coast, offshore wind off California will involve floating turbines. Rough seas make installation challenging, and Ferry said there are looming question marks over offtake and transmission.

Another major challenge is a shortage of ports to serve the offshore wind sector.

That brings us back to Humboldt Bay.

As [TradeWinds](#) has reported, the wind services unit of Florida maritime company Crowley is aiming to build the Humboldt Bay Offshore Wind Heavy Lift Marine Terminal at the site of a shuttered lumber mill and old dock.

Jeff Andreini, the vice president of Crowley Wind Services, said the company has ports at the centre of its strategic vision for serving the offshore wind sector, because they are the nexus for the supply chain that is required to build and run the facilities.

The company, which is developing another terminal in Massachusetts, has been in talks with the Humboldt Bay port district for more than 18 months.

“I remember the first time that I went there,” he told me. “I said, ‘If we can get this, it’s the crown jewel of anything that we will do in the United States’.”

That is because the US West Coast — with its combination of craggy cliffs, protected shorelines and packed-to-the-gill existing ports — suffers from a lack of suitable sites for new terminals. There are just four possibilities, one whose port authority is uninterested at the moment, another with height restrictions and a third with ageing nuclear reactors in the way whose lives were recently extended.

That means Crowley’s proposed terminal would not just serve the offshore wind farms in nearby Humboldt Bay. It would be in a position to serve projects down in southern California, including Morro Bay, and up to the state of Washington.

Wind turbines off Block Island are part of the first US offshore wind farm on the US East Coast. On the West Coast, projects are expected to use floating turbines.

Photo: US Department of Energy

And California needs more than ports. The offshore wind sector will need tugs, barges, anchor-handling vessels and other assets that meet the stringent standards that are going to be required to serve the wind farms, including alternative fuels systems and engine efficiency requirements.



But Andreini said Crowley’s foothold in Humboldt Bay remains the most important opportunity that the company has secured yet.

“California is going to be huge in this market,” he said. “Their aspirations are the same as the nation’s aspirations.”