

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Takes Steps to Advance Offshore Wind Projects

NOVEMBER 5, 2012

Under its [Smart from the Start](#) initiative, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (“BOEM”) has identified a number of offshore Wind Energy Areas (“WEAs”) suitable for wind energy development and has conducted environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) to determine the suitability of development in identified WEAs. The next step in the process will be the issuance of commercial leases to developers for projects within the WEAs. BOEM announced its identification of the offshore Massachusetts WEA, an area of 877 square nautical miles that extends to the south of Martha’s Vineyard and southwest of Nantucket, on May 30, 2012.

On November 2, BOEM released an [Environmental Assessment](#) (“EA”) on the issuance of commercial wind energy leases and approval of Site Assessment Plans (“SAPs”) in the offshore Massachusetts WEA. The EA studied only environmental and socioeconomic impacts from data collection and site assessment activities expected as a result of these approvals. It did not address impacts from the actual construction and operation of offshore wind projects. As background, a commercial wind energy lease only authorizes the lessee the right to use the leased area to develop site assessment and construction plans that ultimately must be approved by BOEM. After receiving a commercial wind energy lease, the developer must submit a SAP proposing construction of site assessment facilities (a meteorological tower and/or meteorological buoys) for a specific term. The final stage in BOEM offshore wind energy approval process is the approval of a Construction and Operation Plan (“COP”), which allows the lessee to construct and operate the wind turbines. Since the EA considered only environmental and socioeconomic effects from the issuance of leases and the approval of SAPs, any subsequent COP within the offshore Massachusetts WEA will require a separate NEPA analysis, likely an Environmental Impact Statement. Additionally, BOEM may conduct a separate NEPA analysis for a subsequent SAP if it determines that the analysis performed in the EA was inadequate for those assessment activities.

The EA studied the proposed action, lease issuance and approval of site assessment activities in all areas of the WEA (Alternative A), as well as four other alternatives described in the [EA](#). BOEM concluded that the proposed action, combined with other reasonably foreseeable projects and activities during the five-year site assessment period, would result in cumulative impacts to the environment. However, with the implementation of mitigating measures called Standard Operating Conditions, BOEM anticipates these cumulative impacts will be negligible to minor. BOEM concluded that the proposed action would facilitate the collection of meteorological, oceanographic, and biological data for the offshore Massachusetts environment, which would lead to a better understanding of wind resources and allow for better planning of wind development in the area.

BOEM will conduct public meetings on the draft EA on November 13-15, 2012, and is soliciting public comments on the EA until December 3, 2012. After considering the public comments received, BOEM will determine whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact or conduct additional analysis under NEPA. Details on meeting locations and times can be found at BOEM's [website](#).

2 Min Read

Related Topics

Energy

Renewable Energy

Related Capabilities

Environmental

This entry has been created for information and planning purposes. It is not intended to be, nor should it be substituted for, legal advice, which turns on specific facts.