

Commercial Wind Lease Issuance and Site Characterization Activities on the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf Offshore New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia - Draft Environmental Assessment

As part of Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar's "Smart from the Start" initiative for Atlantic offshore wind development, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) today announced it is seeking public comment on a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that considers potential environmental and socioeconomic effects of issuing renewable energy leases in designated Wind Energy Areas (WEAs) offshore New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

"America's offshore wind resources offer great potential for helping power the Eastern seaboard and spurring new jobs and innovation," said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. "The 'Smart from the Start' initiative will help companies identify areas offshore that are best suited for wind development, while also reducing the potential for costly delays and red tape. With today's announcement, we are taking another step toward ensuring that renewable development along the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) becomes a reality."

"We welcome stakeholder input throughout the renewable energy leasing process and invite public comments on this draft EA," said BOEMRE Director Michael R. Bromwich. "If leases are issued in these geographic areas, we will conduct a thorough environmental analysis of each proposed commercial project. We will continue to work with our state renewable energy task forces to advance renewable energy development carefully and responsibly."

The draft EA also considers potential environmental impacts associated with site assessment activities such as the installation and operation of meteorological towers and buoys on leases that may be issued in these areas.

This draft EA is part of the "Smart from the Start" initiative being led by Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes and Director Bromwich to facilitate efficient and environmentally-responsible development of renewable energy resources on the Atlantic OCS. The initiative includes the identification of areas on the OCS that appear to be suitable for renewable energy development where BOEMRE will focus its leasing efforts. Any leases ultimately issued will not authorize construction or operations; instead, specific proposed projects will be the subject of subsequent environmental review and analysis with additional opportunities for public comment.

BOEMRE identified the WEAs offshore the mid-Atlantic states in consultation with other federal agencies and BOEMRE's state renewable energy task forces. In February, BOEMRE announced these areas in a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EA for Mid-Atlantic WEAs. BOEMRE requested public input to identify the important environmental issues associated with leasing and site assessment activities within the identified WEAs, along with alternatives to consider in the EA. BOEMRE considered the public comments in drafting the alternatives and assessing potential environmental impacts. The comments BOEMRE received in response to the NOI can be viewed at:
<http://www.regulations.gov/#!searchResults:rpp=10;po=0;s=BOEM-2010-0077>.

The draft EA is available today for review at:

<http://www.boemre.gov/offshore/RenewableEnergy/SmartFromTheStart.htm>.

The notice in the Federal Register is available for inspection at:

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/public-inspection/index.html> and will be published tomorrow. The public is invited to submit comments on the draft EA no later than August 11, 2011 in one of the following ways:

- Electronically: <http://www.boemre.gov/PublicComment.htm>. Click on the "Public Comment" link and follow the instructions to submit public comments and to view supporting and related materials.
- Via mail, addressed to: "Comments on Mid-Atlantic Regional EA" to Program Manager, Office of Offshore Alternative Energy Programs (MS 4090), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, 381 Elden Street, Herndon, VA 20170.

Comments on the draft EA will be considered in the preparation of the final EA. The comments will also assist BOEMRE in determining whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) needs to be prepared, or whether a Finding of No Significant Impact is warranted in connection with issuing renewable energy leases on the OCS offshore the mid-Atlantic states.