

A Gust of Activity in Offshore Wind Leasing

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The Biden-Harris administration took several major steps this week in the advancement of offshore wind leasing in both the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. These actions are part of the administration's government-wide initiative to "fight climate change, produce good-paying, union jobs, and accelerate America's clean energy economy." Together, these efforts aim to meet the administration's goal to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030.

First, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the agency responsible for offshore energy and mineral leasing, announced on Tuesday, January 11, that it is preparing a draft environmental assessment (EA) to analyze potential environmental impacts of wind leasing in the Gulf of Mexico. In the EA, BOEM will assess the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts over a survey area of 30 million acres in the Central and Western Gulf of Mexico, from west of the Mississippi River to the Texas/Mexican border. Based on comments received from stakeholders, BOEM will narrow the field to locations that appear most suitable for wind energy development, referred to as "Wind Energy Areas." If, based on the results of the EA, BOEM decides to move forward with a lease sale, the agency will prepare a more detailed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) before any construction of an offshore wind facility may commence. Interested parties may [submit comments](#) to BOEM until February 9, 2022. BOEM forecasts that the EA will be completed this summer. Producing an EA is a pivotal first step toward issuing wind leases in the Gulf of Mexico.

BOEM followed this announcement on Wednesday with the release of its plan to hold a record-breaking offshore wind lease sale that will offer six wind lease areas comprising 488,201 acres in the New York Bight off the coasts of New York and New Jersey. This is the largest lease sale of offshore wind areas in the United States. The [Final Sale Notice](#) for Atlantic Wind Sale 8 provides potential bidders with information on the lease areas, the major deadlines and requirements of the auction process, the lease stipulations, an overview of the financial terms and conditions of a lease, and the post-auction procedures. The lease sale is scheduled for February 23, 2022, at 9 a.m. Eastern.

On Wednesday, BOEM also entered into a [memorandum of understanding](#) (Memorandum) with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to "coordinate resources, input, and associated responsibilities pertaining to the United States offshore wind program on the Outer Continental Shelf." The Memorandum addresses potential areas of cooperation between the agencies, including efforts to improve the efficiency of environmental and other regulatory reviews;

advance scientific understanding of the impacts of offshore wind; and conduct surveying, modeling, mapping, and oceanographic assessments of ocean regions.

Complementing BOEM's efforts, the US Department of Energy released a report on Wednesday outlining regional and national strategies to accelerate offshore wind operations. The [Offshore Wind Energy Strategies Report](#) is an interagency effort outlining five strategic priority areas to accelerate offshore wind leasing and facilitate successful industry growth. Such strategies include expanding federal incentives to increase demand in wind energy, investing in technological innovations to lower wind energy costs, improving regulatory processes, developing the supply chain by investing in ports and vessels to service the offshore wind industry, and building an efficient and reliable transmission grid.

These coordinated government efforts promise a rapid build-up of the offshore wind industry. As the Biden-Harris administration has prioritized investment in clean energy resources, 2022 is sure to be a year of growth in the offshore wind energy sector. We will continue to monitor and provide updates on future developments.

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