MA Habitat Working Group on Offshore Wind

Convened virtually

October 10, 2024, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the meeting. Presentations shared can be accessed on the Habitat Working Group website.

State Updates

The Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), shared the following updates:

- In September, BOEM announced the Final Sale Notice for eight new lease areas in the Gulf of Maine. The auction is upcoming on October 29th, 2024. There may be additional leases in 2028.
- The Interagency Offshore Wind Council (IOWC) is continuing to work on the Governor's Plan for Offshore Wind. The IOWC solicited public input on the draft plan with a public comment period that closed at the beginning of October. The plan will be finalized later this fall.
- Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) is currently reviewing research applications and will give awards in November. This round of awards will focus on wildlife, fish, and habitat proposals.
- Aerial wildlife surveys through Campaign 8 will carry through November of this year. New funding from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) will allow these surveys to continue through the first half of 2025. The New England Aquarium has funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that will continue the surveys into Spring 2026.
- CZM continues work to minimize the impacts of cable crossings in Ocean Sanctuaries. Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) has created a working group on OSW transmission, which is helping to gather data for appropriate siting of transmissions and cables.

Maine Offshore Wind Research Consortium

Casey Yanos, from Maine Department of Marine Resources, presented on research being conducted in the Gulf of Maine:

The Maine Offshore Wind Research Consortium finalized the Gulf of Maine Research Lease, which includes 10 floating wind turbines. The Consortium is led by the Maine Governor's Energy Office and focuses on reducing co-use conflicts, reducing impacts on ecosystems, understanding socioeconomic impacts and community benefits, and advancing technology development to reduce costs. The research involves baseline surveys and monitoring to understand and track the impacts of wind turbines. The surveys are designed, where possible, to align with developer survey requirements. The Consortium aims to address critical data gaps highlighted by rapid offshore wind development, and to develop a scalable research framework for offshore wind arrays. The research lease also hosts other research projects, including avian species distribution and modeling, regional oceanographic modeling, and other projects. Additional information can be found in the attached presentation.

The working group shared the following questions (Q) and answers (A):

Q: Does the research scope include marine mammals?

A: The consortium has set up Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) receivers and plans to set up other surveys. The Biodiversity Research Institute is doing an aerial survey in the array, and the Maine Department of Marine Resources is potentially setting up its own aerial survey.

Q: Mooring systems range from strictly vertical to ones with more scope. This could affect the ability of fishing to take place within the array. When will a decision be made about anchoring within the research lease?
A: The timeline is unclear.

Q: Is there any work being done to bring in perspectives and funding sources from other states, beyond Maine?
A: We are definitely interested in keeping conversations going with other states. This research is in its early stages. We don't want to overwhelm the scope of work by making it a regional conversation too quickly.

Participant Updates

Chris McGuire, The Nature Conservancy (TNC): TNC is hosting a monthly webinar series on offshore wind. Last month was on whales, this month is on seabirds.

Brandon Jensen (BOEM) and Lisa Brothers (USGS): BOEM is developing a report to compile all available data on off shore wind in the Gulf of Maine. The report will hopefully be released by March. The goal is to identify and direct funding to data gap areas.

Mike Pol, Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA): ROSA is currently developing a Request For Proposal and hopes to issue a notice of intent soon.

Developer Updates

Vineyard Offshore - Elizabeth Marsjanik: In September 2024, Vineyard Offshore was selected by MA to procure up to 800MW in a new HVDC project, Vineyard Wind 2. The remaining 400 MW is still under evaluation. In Vineyard Wind 1, pile driving will resume this month and array cable installation continues. Post construction surveys started this year after the installation of the connection cable to the mainland. The preliminary data is promising. Vineyard Offshore is engaged in two monitoring projects. Project WOW includes bat acoustic monitoring and whale monitoring. Project Ocean W'aKes is a multi-actor collaboration to evaluate the wake effect behind wind turbines. Initial data will be released in early 2025.

Southcoast Wind - Kyle Cassidy: In September 2024, SouthCoast wind was selected by MA and RI for a long-term contract. They are making progress in the permitting process. They are completing a horizontal directional drilling pit location (HDD) survey later this fall, as well as a remote operated vehicle (ROV) target survey. SouthCoast Wind held a PSO training program in Fall River, MA for tribal communities in September.

Avangrid - John Harker: John Harker provided updates on two projects: New England Wind 1 (Park City Wind) and New England Wind 2 (Commonwealth Wind). New England Wind 1 was awarded in September by MA for its full capacity. Commercial operation is anticipated by 2028. New England Wind 2 has not progressed as far in the permitting process as New England Wind 1, and does not have a power purchase agreement yet. Both projects are HVAC because of their proximity to the mainland. Avangrid is kicking off a fisheries monitoring plan. The award for this plan is forthcoming. Avangrid is working to make themselves available to interested and impacted communities and fisheries through monthly port hours and fisheries advocacy and research groups.

Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative Science Plan

Emily Shumchenia, Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC), shared that the Partnership for an Offshore Wind Energy Regional Observation Network (POWERON) is working on an effort to coordinate regional continuity in PAM. BOEM has designated 36 months of funding ($4 million) to the Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC) to coordinate, develop, and implement a PAM field plan. RWSC is pushing for data standardization and mandatory data collection. Developers currently opt in to contribute funds to allow PAM to be conducted on their behalf. Along the Atlantic coast there are 102 active PAM projects and 31 total funders. RWSC is working to develop a data catalog to detail who is receiving funding and the data being produced. A research planning map is part of this catalog. This map includes relocated boulders, but not their origin points. Working group participants were invited to share shape files of origin points if they have them.

Boulders Update

Hollie Emery, CZM, shared that a glacial moraine stretches from Long Island to Cape Cod, creating a boulder field. Both Revolution Wind and South Fork wind have leases that cross these moraines. Boulders must be moved to allow for the construction of wind turbines. Moving boulders has created concerns for safety, damage to fishing industry gear, and loss of habitat. CZM developed a guidance document taking into account these concerns. CZM has GIS mapping for the new location of boulders, but this mapping does not specify the size of the boulders, or their initial location.

The working group shared the following questions (Q) and answers (A):
Q: Is the guidance document published?
A: It is still in draft form, the final copy has not been released.

Q: What size of boulder is a problem?
A: A boulder as small as a foot or two can be a problem. Only boulders that are a meter or two are posted publicly.

Q: Why isn't restoration an option?
A: Once the boulder is moved, it's permanent. It can't be put back in the initial location.

Annie Murphy, INSPIRE, presented the South Fork Wind boulder relocation benthic monitoring study. This study aims to gather data on habitat changes on and around relocated boulders. The study hypothesizes that the relocation of existing natural hard bottom habitats (boulders) will alter the physical habitat characteristics with potential for rapid colonization of relocated boulders. The study found that relocated boulder communities resemble control boulders in terms of what and how many invertebrates are found on the boulder. Encrusting pink/orange taxa cover a small percentage of boulder surfaces. The study observed physical shifts and changes in complexity in boulder distributions. Todd Callaghan noted that developers are not always moving boulders to appropriate glacial moraine habitats. Boulders are being relocated within a given radius, which may include sand as well as glacial moraine.

The working group shared the following questions (Q) and answers (A):
Q: What is the radius of the scour protection relative to the moved boulder ring?
A: It is about 200 meters.

Q: Are you just capturing one vantage point of each boulder, or are you taking multiple images to capture all the taxa which may be present, including the cryptic crevices.
A: We are collecting different vantage points as we can, though we can't get into all the crevices.

Q: Have you also considered encrusting bryozoans for the mysterious encrusting pink invertebrates?
A: We have a list of several candidate species that it could be. It could be a tunicate.

Q: Why do so many boulders need to be moved? A bunch didn't seem like they were in the direct path of the cable or anywhere near the turbine/scour protection area.
A: My guess is that they need enough space for the lift, which is a 200 to 300-foot radius. The maximum radius is also written into the developer contract.

Next Steps

Abby Fullem, Consensus Building Institute facilitation team, closed the meeting and reviewed the following next steps:

- In future meetings, developer updates will be shared in advance
- Working group participants invited to share shape files of original locations of boulders with Todd Callaghan
- CBI: Determine date and send calendar invites for next meeting in early December
- CZM: Post meeting materials on website.