

## MA Habitat Working Group on Offshore Wind

Virtual Meeting – October 12, 2023

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### MEETING SUMMARY

*The following summary aims to capture the key themes and topics discussed during the meeting. It is not intended to provide a verbatim transcript of the conversation but rather to offer an overview of the main points covered. Presentation slides and a meeting agenda can be found on the Habitat Working Group on Offshore Wind Energy webpage: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/habitat-working-group-on-offshore-wind-energy>.*

### Updates from Massachusetts

Lisa Engler and Hollie Emery, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (MA CZM) began the meeting with several updates for working group members.

Offshore wind projects:

- CZM is actively reviewing offshore wind projects proposed south of the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.
- Regarding existing projects, federal consistency concurrence has recently been issued to Sunrise Wind. Federal Consistency Review is also underway for the Avangrid New England Wind project, with scheduled completion in early November. All CZM's federal consistency documents can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/czms-role-in-offshore-wind>
- CZM is working on bringing in stakeholder input and knowledge to SouthCoast Wind projects in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and to ongoing work in the Gulf of Maine with Maine, New Hampshire, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM).
  - If any members of the working group have suggestions for BOEM about public engagement methods, especially those that have worked well or needed improvement, please reach out to Lisa directly.

Boulder movement framework:

- Boulders are moved during the offshore wind construction process, resulting in disturbance to the seabed. CZM is developing a framework for best practices on boulder movement, including sharing moved boulder locations and assessing boulder relocations to encourage minimal impact on the marine environment and local fishing activity.
- The planning process will ideally map out intended locations for moved boulders in advance. This will allow local stakeholders to provide relevant feedback before relocation and disturbance occur. The goal is to eventually make the locations and coordinates of moved boulders publicly available and easy to input into navigation software.

Wildlife mitigation:

- CZM worked with the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC), the Division of Marine Fisheries, and The Division of Fisheries & Wildlife - Natural Heritage and Endangered Species program in consultation with subject matter experts in non-profit

conservation organizations to develop a draft framework that offers guidance and best practices for wildlife mitigation and monitoring. Hollie Emery, MA CZM, shared an overview of the framework with the working group and invited feedback.

- The framework will be circulated to all members of the working group. The intention is to complete the framework this fall and make it available to all developers making bids in the current offshore wind energy procurement RFP.

The following questions were asked by the working group:

- Q: How can we assess the difference between the layout of the seabed before boulders were moved, and after? A: *CZM is developing guidelines for boulder movement with the intention to reduce impacts to the habitat and to fishermen. They are currently exploring what the best locations might be. For example, boulders will not be moved to soft bottomed areas on the seabed.*
- Q: Has the fishing industry provided any input as to what layouts would work best? For example, should boulders be moved into clusters, or spaced out in lines? A: *There is no current consensus on a single formation being best for all fishermen. The most suitable formation will depend on specific sectors of the fishing industry. This is an ongoing topic of discussion in the Fisheries Working Group. Department of Marine Fisheries and the fishing industry are both part of the conversation.*
- Q: Will this framework apply only to organizations with power purchase agreements in Massachusetts, or in Massachusetts coastal waters? A: *This framework will provide developers with guidelines, but not regulatory requirements. These will be applicable to Massachusetts state waters, and potentially outside these boundaries as well.*
- Q: Will the guidelines include both fisheries and habitat considerations? A: *Yes. The goal is for boulder movement to have minimal impact on both fisheries and habitat.*
  - *Comment: There may be guidance on boulders, or standards for dealing with them, in the policies surrounding European offshore wind development. These may be a good reference point for the team developing the framework.*
  - *Comment: FYI for all - boulder relocation-related conditions for BOEM's Construction and Operations Plan (COP) approval (permit conditions) are required for offshore wind projects as a result of EFH consultations. Here's an example for Revolution Wind - see Section 5.6.6, page A-52. I recommend reaching out to NOAA to see how they are balancing their EFH recommendations with commercial fishing needs.*  
[https://www.boem.gov/sites/default/files/documents/renewable-energy/state-activities/Revolution-Wind-Record-of-Decision-OCS-A-0486\\_3.pdf](https://www.boem.gov/sites/default/files/documents/renewable-energy/state-activities/Revolution-Wind-Record-of-Decision-OCS-A-0486_3.pdf)
  - *Comment: In the wildlife mitigation guidance, I would suggest including cleaning up entanglement risks onsite in addition to offsite. Non-offshore wind industry fishing gear can be found anywhere.*

### **Seatrac Capabilities and Seafloor Mapping Efforts**

Hobie Boeschstein, Director of Product and Business Development at Seatrac Systems, introduced Seatrac and discussed their platform, capabilities, and the types of work they support.

Seatrac is headquartered in Marblehead, MA. They provide Uncrewed Surface Vehicles (USVs) to support work and research in scientific, commercial, and military industries. A notable new capability they offer is a winch system that allows sampling to a depth of 200 meters.

Members of the working group are welcome to reach out to Seatrac to collaborate on data collection work. Hobie can be contacted directly with any questions:

[hboeschstein@seatrac.com](mailto:hboeschstein@seatrac.com).

## **Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative - Draft Science Plan & Passive Acoustic Monitoring**

### **Draft Science Plan**

Emily Shumchenia, Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC), discussed progress on the RWSC's Draft Science Plan. The plan aims to build on ongoing research efforts and prioritize areas such as standardized data collection, data sharing, and effective data management for large-scale analyses. It will also align funding streams and promote greater collaboration.

The science plan was available for public comment for a 90-day period, ending September 30, 2023. One of the biggest takeaways from the feedback reviewed so far is that most chapters of the science plan require significant consolidation. The revised plan will include consolidated chapters from each subcommittee.

The timeline for finalizing the science plan is as follows:

- November: Sector caucuses meet to review and provide further feedback.
- Late November: Steering Committee to receive final revisions after Thanksgiving.
- December: Final discussions. Science plan finalized by end of year.

### **PAM Related News and Reminders:**

Emily Shumchenia, RWSC, shared brief updates surrounding recent work on Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM).

- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently released a Marine Mammal Climate Vulnerability Assessment, available to view on their website: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/climate/climate-vulnerability-assessments>
- RWSC has completed and posted to their website a research summary titled Power Analysis for the Optimal Design of a Passive Acoustic Monitoring Network for US East Coast Offshore Wind.
- Updated PAM deployment maps will be available in November.

Emily highlighted the need for ongoing coordination between BOEM and RWSC for long term/archival PAM deployment and data. This data will be reused extensively over time, and needs to be available to the public. These needs were discussed during a two-day PAM Workshop in September. The first day was open to the public, and the second day was attended by state and federal funders of PAM. A recording of the meeting on day one, and summaries of both days' discussions will be made available soon. Participants discussed setting requirements

for projects to make data available within three months of collection. They also discussed the rights of researchers; it was agreed that researchers will have the right to retain raw data, and publish derivative works using that data on separate timelines.

### **New England Aquarium Aerial Survey Update**

Orla O'Brien and Jessica Redfern of New England Aquarium (NEAq) provided updates on the ongoing aerial surveys. Campaign 7 found that there are fewer right whales detected than in previous years and that whales were seen in multispecies feeding aggregations. Campaign 8 has been ongoing since September 2022. Thus far, 42 surveys have been completed and the Campaign is projected to end by late 2024. NEAq is also working on habitat models to understand probability of right whale occurrence in lease areas. It should help us understand long term patterns of right whales in this habitat. 2017 had low numbers, though they have increased since. They are examining oceanographic conditions that might have caused a dip in numbers. Please see meeting slides for more detailed information.

The following question was asked by the working group:

Q: All those oceanographic parameters look good, but there's an intermediate level that of course controls everything. Are there any plans to inject zooplankton into that triad? *A: We're using those variables as proxies and looking at modeled layers of predictions for right whale prey. We're interested in partnering with NOAA, other organizations, to look closer.*

### **Member Updates**

Joan Walsh from Mass Audubon shared that the National Wildlife Federation hosted several environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (eNGOs) on an offshore wind learning trip to Scotland and England. Some high-level takeaways for birds: The Crown Estate (the leasing agents in United Kingdom) has real concerns about the uncertainty of current inputs for collision risk models and stressed the need to get more data on behaviors of seabirds near turbines. The eNGOs are hoping to have a small group meeting with them to get details about the data needs, and to talk about cross-pond collaboration. The eNGOs were also able to visit the Hysted floating turbines off Aberdeen and in both offshore trips saw gulls attracted to the turbine platforms for roosting, and shearwaters "shearing" into the rotor-swept zone— for the "bird folks" on the trip this was surprising and stressed the need to close data gaps about how birds act near turbines. It was a great experience.

### **Offshore Wind Developer Updates**

*Michelle Fogarty, Equinor*

National Wildlife Federation (NWF) recently sponsored a visit to Equinor's Hywind Tampen floating wind farm in Scotland. The visit was attended by a large number of organizations, and helped inform them of possible pathways to pursue in the US. NWF plans to release a video summarizing the trip, which will be shared with HWG once it is available.

***Kyle Cassidy, SouthCoast Wind (formerly Mayflower Wind)***

Kyle shared the following updates in regards to permitting: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Assessment was completed in September; Essential Fish Habitat consultation between BOEM and National Marine Fisheries Service is ongoing; Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection approved the sediment sampling plan around Brayton Point (Somerset, Massachusetts); SouthCoast Wind has begun the benthic habitat impacts review process with Rhode Island's (RI) Coastal Resources Management Council as part of federal consistency; and SouthCoast Wind finished Geophysical and Geological survey campaigns earlier this spring. SouthCoast Wind contacted Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and R.I. Department of Environmental Management to send information to mariners about sediment sampling. Kyle is now the Marine Science Program Manager for SouthCoast Wind (he was formerly with Ørsted) and can be reached at [kyle.cassidy@southcoastwind.com](mailto:kyle.cassidy@southcoastwind.com)

***Sharon Whitesell & Christopher Sarro, Ørsted***

Sharon shared several updates in regards to Ørsted's Northeast Program for marine mammals, birds/bats, fisheries monitoring, and benthic monitoring. Ørsted is evaluating plans for long-term Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) and extending funding of two science initiatives. Fisheries monitoring and benthic monitoring surveys are ongoing across South Fork, Revolution, and Sunrise Wind. For birds/bats, post-construction monitoring plans are being developed (Revolution and Sunrise) or have been submitted (South Fork) to BOEM. They are installing and configuring receiving stations, evaluating avian tagging studies and establishing worker incidental reporting systems at all sites, among other updates. South Fork construction continues alongside these programs.

Christopher shared further updates on the South Fork construction timeline. As of October 2023, HDD work, export cable installation and burial, foundation installation, array cable installation and burial, and scour protection installation are complete. Installation of turbine generators and blades begins in October. Additional array cables will be installed starting November 2023. South Fork will continue to commission individual turbines on an ongoing basis.

The following question was asked by the working group:

Q: When do you expect to flip the switch at South Fork? A: *This may happen as early as next month for individual turbines.*

***Liz Marsjanik, Vineyard Wind***

Liz shared updates on construction progress and ongoing science initiatives at Vineyard Wind 1. Vineyard Wind 1 recently achieved a major milestone and erected their first full turbine. Liz extended her thanks to members of the working group who have supported their work. Construction at Covell's Beach (Barnstable) parking lot is complete. They continue to work on cable installation and the electrical service platform. Liz noted that bad weather has been a major cause of delay. She highlighted the double bubble curtain used at the site, with an outer layer that is made in the US.

Through their Wind and Whales Fund, Vineyard Wind is working on a real-time PAM monitoring vessel transit corridor and supporting an artificial intelligence lookout system. Their compliance work involves archival and real-time PAM monitoring, fisheries studies, and water quality sampling. They also participate in a number of regional science initiatives including Wind Turbine Radar Interference Mitigation, and Wind Forecast Improvement Project 3.

### **Next Steps and Action Items**

Lisa Engler thanked everyone for attending and noted that future meetings will be two hours to allow for more discussion and feedback.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 PM