

# MA Habitat Working Group on Offshore Wind

*Convened virtually*

*December 3, 2024, 9:00 – 11:00 AM*

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## 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:**

- The Interagency Strategic Council for Offshore Wind is still in development and headed towards finalization.
- CZM successfully applied for federal funds for seafloor mapping of lease OCS-A 0567 and the completion of mapping of lease OCS-A 0568. These leases were prioritized as they are most likely to be developed first. The mapping will begin in 2026.
- Decommissioning of gas pipeline infrastructure will inform planning for the decommissioning of offshore wind farms. To decommission infrastructure in a recent pipeline project, suction anchors will be cut off 3 feet below the mud line, as an alternative to removing the full depth of the anchor and leaving a hole with a diameter of approximately 60 feet. Conversations are in process about appropriate infill and remediation.

**Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) shared the following updates:**

- MassCEC is getting close to distributing research awards. The awarded research projects will have a broad scope, including fisheries, habitat, and technology. The key interest of these awards is to help ensure good science, and to foster buy-in from broader networks working on these issues. To this end, MassCEC is proposing to form project advisory groups for each research project, connecting members of the Habitat and Fisheries Working Groups with research teams. These research teams will also report back to the Habitat and Fisheries Working Groups.

### Maine Offshore Wind Research Consortium

**Casey Yanos, from Maine Department of Marine Resources, presented on surveys and monitoring being conducted in the Gulf of Maine:**

- **Zooplankton and Larval Lobster Survey:** Sampling was conducted from September 2023 to the end of August, 2024. The sampling began before the lease area had been determined. While the lease area does not overlay directly with the sampling area, the decision was made to continue sampling in the initially designated area to ensure accurate spatial heterogeneity.
- **Active Acoustic Survey:** Began in June 2024 and is ongoing. Surveys take two days and cover north-south transects. Transect lines may be shifted further south to center on the Finalized Lease Area.
- **Highly Migratory Species Monitoring:** This monitoring effort tags any species that are moving through the array area. The receiving network has already started picking up tagged animals.
- **Oceanographic Monitoring:** Three shore-based stations have been installed and collecting surface wind data. Five underwater glider deployments have collected oceanographic data around the entire Request for Competitive Interest (RFCI) area.

- **Interviews on Historic Use:** The research consortium is working with anthropologists at University of Maine to assess how community members and fishers relate to the area and how it has changed over time. This assessment will complement oceanographic and spatial data.

**Participants shared the following questions (Q) and answers (A):**

**Q:** What are the plans to survey marine mammals and birds?

**A:** The Research Consortium has plans for a passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) network to be deployed, though the timing is uncertain. The Department of Marine Resources has an extensive team for marine mammals, and conducts monthly surveys. The Active Acoustic survey included bird observers for the first year. This is no longer funded but there are efforts to find additional funding. Additional information can be found here: [Wildlife Observation Layers](#); [Marine Mammal Aerial Survey](#).

**Q:** What is the general timeline for construction in the research array in Maine?

**A:** 2030 is the projected timeline for turbines to be in the water.

**Q:** Is there an online resource that documents the planned and ongoing monitoring for the research array?

**A:** This information is available through the [RWSC website](#). Search for “Maine Department of Marine Resources.”

## Participant Updates

**Laura Brothers, US Geological Survey (USGS):** USGS is conducting a review of benthic data and geophysical data in active lease sites. A report will be available by March. USGS is collaborating with the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement to survey and sort publicly available data for seabed hazards across all lease areas in the United States. This report should also be released in March.

**Mike Pol, Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA):** ROSA has \$3.4 million available for research on to advance understanding of regional and cumulative effects of offshore wind on fish and fisheries, including advancing the current state of knowledge on the potential of offshore wind development to impact the survival, transport, settlement, and distribution of commercially important fish and invertebrate larvae. [Concept papers](#) due by December 20, 2024.

**Chris McGuire, The Nature Conservancy (TNC):** TNC is holding an ongoing webinar on offshore wind, called the Nature Connect Webinar. More information can be found [here](#).

**Chris McGuire, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS) Advisory Council:** There is an ongoing conversation about identifying cable corridors through the sanctuary. A new NCCOS methods paper helps to identify transmission suitability. The sanctuary is still in the process of updating guidance on special use permits.

**The working group shared the following questions (Q) and answers (A) for Chris on the SBNMS updates:**

**Q:** Will the NCCOS methods paper be shared with developers?

**A:** Yes, the NCCOS report will be public.

**Q:** When will the policy around special use permits be updated, and what are the implications?

**A:** There is already a telecommunications cable that runs through the Sanctuary. Under Sanctuary regulations, cables are permitted for a period of time (approx. 5 years). The special permit for telecommunications cable has been renewed for 20 years without incident. There has been a lot of

uncertainty about the special use permit. The Sanctuary office is updating the special use permit policies in order to provide greater clarity. This update will happen over the next year.

- A few working group members suggested that this is an opportunity to connect conversations about the Ocean Sanctuary Act and the Special Use Permits.

## **BOEM Overview of Leases, Programs, Studies**

**Luke Feinberg and Kyle Baker from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), presented an overview of leases programs and studies.**

The Gulf of Maine auction was held on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Two provisional winners (Avangrid Renewables and Invenenergy NE Offshore Wind) were awarded 4 lease areas. Four lease areas have yet to be sold. The winners have up to 5 years to conduct surveys and then must submit plans, which must include communications plans for engagement with Tribes, fisheries, and agencies. These engagement plans must be completed within 6 months of lease effective date.

BOEM is conducting or has recently completed numerous protected species studies. A list of these studies can be found [here](#).

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

**Q:** What is the geographic scope for the project on epibenthic invertebrates?

**A:** The project encompasses the whole Gulf of Maine, but within the Gulf, the new lease areas are being prioritized.

**Q:** How is data from these projects being shared?

**A:** All USGS data must be public and is serviced on various websites.

## **Next Steps**

**The working group held an open discussion about potential topics for the Habitat Working Group in 2025. The following topics and presentations were suggested:**

**Discussion topics:**

- Data coordination and identifying biological data gaps
- Developing recommendations for what comprehensive baseline data entails
- Best practices for decommissioning of offshore wind farms
- Nature-based design/biodiversity enhanced OSW structures
- Habitat implications of future cabling routes in state waters

**Future Presentations:**

- RWSC updates on current work and focus areas
- Streamlined permit system
- USGS research update
- NCCOS Stellwagen research method paper
- MassCEC Research Advisory Boards

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

- The HWG planning team will review suggested discussion topics and presentation, and prioritize topics for 2025
- CBI: Determine date for the next HWG meeting in the first quarter of 2025 and send calendar invites
- CZM: Post meeting materials on the website