MA Habitat Working Group on Offshore Wind

In person meeting, CZM Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

May 9, 2024, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

MEETING SUMMARY

Updates from Massachusetts

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

- Todd Callaghan welcomed the new CZM director, Alison Brizius, to the team. Alison was previously the City of Boston's Commissioner of Environment. She received her Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Chicago.
- Efforts are underway to map potential shore pathways in collaboration with NOAA, and discussions are ongoing about addressing sea floor mapping gaps through NROC. The 60-day comment period for the Gulf of Maine offshore Wind Proposed Sale Notice is now open and a link is provided on the Habitat Working Group (HWG) website and through the offshore wind status viewer maintained by CZM. The offshore wind development lease status web viewer shows lease status by color and is being updated regularly.
- *Eve Schlüter, Mass Wildlife,* discussed the Governor's biodiversity initiative, stemming from Governor Healey's executive order, which sets ambitious conservation goals. This initiative has four pillars: protecting important habitats, restoring habitats with a focus on connectivity, sustaining resources such as fisheries and farms, and connecting people to nature. Public listening sessions are anticipated in July to gather feedback on these goals, and updates can be received by signing up on the website. The biodiversity roadmap may also help offshore wind developers, especially in the areas of protection and restoration.
- *Austin Dawson, Department of Energy Resources*, provided a status update on the 83C IV procurement. Three developers participated in the latest procurement, with public information available online. The timeline includes bid evaluations continuing into August, negotiations beginning in October, and review and approval scheduled for November. Massachusetts is asking for up to 3600 megawatts of energy, with combined bids from other states potentially reaching up to 6800 megawatts. The multistate coordination process allows developers to propose bids that can be selected by multiple states.
- *Hollie Emery, CZM,* provided an update on wildlife best practices documents. Two documents covering guidance for monitoring & research, and for mitigation for wildlife and offshore wind are nearly ready for posting online, with a limited review available upon request.
- *Nils Bolgen, MassCEC,* described a MassCEC funding solicitation which aims to support offshore wind science and research projects in Massachusetts, with up to $5 million

available in grants of up to $1.5 million each. A total of 57 concept papers were received, with 56 eligible and categorized into three groups.

Offshore Wind Roadmap Strategic Plan – Seth Lattrell (VHB)

The Interagency Offshore Wind Council is developing a Massachusetts offshore wind strategic plan. The council consists of a steering committee, three subcommittees, and representatives of various Massachusetts agencies. The IOWC's goal is to develop a strategic plan for offshore wind development from now through 2040. The process involves conducting stakeholder interviews, virtual public meetings, and drafting and revising the strategic plan before finalizing it. Currently, they are in the listening phase and outlining the plan. Public comments will be invited in late summer, with a public info session scheduled for August or September. In April, stakeholder engagement at the meeting focused on Environmental, Ecology, and Marine Uses highlighted themes such as the overall impact of offshore wind, data sharing and transparency between developers and the state, siting concerns, minimizing the impacts of cable installation, and the effects of array spacing on fishing access and insurance.

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

- Q: Beyond shared corridors, where are we with big picture planning? Will we see buildout of all leases before shared transmission?
    - *A: Gulf of Maine Offshore Wind Task Force is covering this, with funding allocated to building out a grid and how to involve the right people in this conversation.*
- Q: How are impacts on land planned to be avoided?
    - *A: This is addressed by offshore connections to limit impacts on land.*
- Q: Is there a shared cable corridor strategy for transmission connections, strategy? There may be cable challenges if they need repair and it would be optimal to maximize each cable route.
    - *A: There is an interest in consolidating the cable corridors as much as possible.*
    - ***Action:*** *Interest to have a joint transmission focused meeting with Fisheries Working Group to further discuss.*

Gulf of Maine Wind Energy Areas and Proposed Sale Notice – Zach Jylkka, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)

The renewable energy authorization process in the Gulf of Maine is currently in the Planning & Analysis stage and is about to move into the Leasing phase. The planning process begins with a large area, which is narrowed down after various iterations of stakeholder engagement. This involves eliminating certain areas in the Gulf of Maine and federal waters and narrowing down to a final call area. Last fall, draft wind energy areas were announced, and the wind energy areas were finalized in the spring. Specific areas near Massachusetts were chosen and others excluded from the wind energy area based on state recommendations and fishing concerns.

The Proposed Sale Notice (PSN) summarizes that there are eight leases covering under a million acres, specifically 944,000 developable acres. The average lease size is 120,000 acres, with a combined capacity of around 15 gigawatts based on a power density of 4 megawatts per square kilometer. The acreage needed to meet renewable energy goals vary based on energy density. Achieving geographic diversity was a goal, with a 3-gigawatt target for Maine and areas close to their coast, as well as 10 GW for Massachusetts. There is an emphasis from the industry and states to retain AC-compatible areas due to technological questions regarding floating substations, which do not yet exist. Areas heavily used by the ground fish fishery, free transit corridors, and a few sensitive habitats were avoided. Important fishing areas and deferred areas far offshore, which are more expensive, were also excluded. No turbines, foundations, or anchoring systems are allowed in certain areas.

Good neighbor stipulations require that two adjacent leases retain two common lines of orientation within wind turbine generation or have a setback. The auction format is divided into North and South regions, with bidders able to win a maximum of two leases (one in each region or two in the South). An alternative structure would have three leases in three regions, with one lease per region. Public meetings will include economic team members to answer questions. Bidding credits are capped at 25%, with two credits at 12.5% each for investment programs unique to this process such as port infrastructure, and the Fisheries Compensatory Mitigation Fund.

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

- Q: Is the approach to the fisheries bid credit different from previous auctions? What is the intention?
    - *A: The intention is to make sure funds allocated through bidding credit would at first be reserved to address fisheries impact in region.*
- Q: In regard to conservation bid credits, would BOEM welcome feedback in comment period to include them?
    - *A: Everyone is encouraged to continue pushing during comment period. However, the approach with the PSN is to minimally change things before the FSN because of realistic limitations within Bureau. There is uncertainty about total funds that will come from this sale.*
- Q: For transmission, how do the southern lease areas compare in relation to MA? Is there a plan to have transmission lines running through the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS)and will there be a public process?
    - *A: CZM is participating in an advisory role in a GIS planning exercise by NOAA National Centers for Coastal and Ocean Science and SBNMS. The team is using existing geospatial data to determine where, should cables be permitted within the sanctuary, they might be sited with the least amount of impact to existing resources and uses.*

Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative Science Plan – Emily Shumchenia

Emily shared an update on the Regional Wildlife Collaborative Science Plan. Subcommittees are meeting bimonthly in open sessions, fostering transparency and collaboration. New tools are being developed, together termed the OSW data ecosystem, which includes an offshore wind and wildlife research database, a map of research assets and activities, and a comprehensive data catalog. A new data set on the Northeast Ocean Data Portal, specifically on relocated boulders, has been added. The steering committee and sector caucuses have created recommendations for funders and researchers to guide their work. Updates are being shared through a monthly newsletter, a public events page, and LinkedIn, with an open invitation for inquiries. Additionally, new seafloor mapping areas for the Gulf of Maine, planned for this year, have been added to the map, enhancing the comprehensiveness of the monitoring efforts.

Lessons Learned From Construction – Seafloor Disturbance and Eelgrass

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The lessons learned from project development highlight the importance of early stakeholder engagement and avoiding the installation of foundations and cables in certain areas. When avoidance is not possible, micrositing is used to minimize impacts, and mitigation measures are the next step. The SFW Native boulder habitat and novel surfaces were surveyed using ROVs, examining boulders, foundations, scour pads, and mattresses. The timeframe for the scour pads survey was a month ago, with a focus on the right side where the cable enters. Additionally, lessons were learned from South Fork Wind benthic monitoring, which will inform future projects.

Vineyard Wind

The project overview indicates that 47 foundations are in the water, and turbines are currently being installed, with completion expected by the end of the year. Stakeholder engagement is ongoing. A representative from the Woods Hole Group discussed the background of eelgrass and outlining a research study scope and method. There is a one-year post-construction survey scheduled for August. The export cables overview highlighted an 800MW transmission system with two 220kV circuits. The cables land at Covell's Beach in Barnstable and are connected to onshore cables via horizontal directional drilling (HDD), with the total cable route spanning 40 miles. For nearshore shallow water protection, e-concrete mattress solutions were chosen. Surveys of the cable routes are planned to start this summer.

Next Steps and Closing

Melanie Gárate, HWG facilitation team, closed the meeting and reviewed the following next steps:

- CBI: Send calendar invites for fall 2024 HWG meetings.
- CBI: Schedule future HWG meetings to be at least 2 hours.
- CBI: Transmission joint meeting between HWG & FWG.
- CZM: Post meeting materials on website.