

Wind Energy Development off Atlantic Coast

US Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has launched a 'Smart from the Start' wind energy initiative for the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf to facilitate siting, leasing and construction of new projects, spurring the rapid and responsible development of this abundant renewable resource.

"Our 'Smart from the Start' Initiative for Atlantic wind will allow us to identify priority Wind Energy Areas for potential development, improve our coordination with local, state, and federal partners, and accelerate the leasing process," Salazar noted. "We can help build a robust and environmentally responsible offshore renewable energy program that creates jobs here at home." The accelerated leasing process is being simplified through a regulatory change, enabling leases to be issued in 2011 and 2012.

"This accelerated and focused approach to developing the nation's Atlantic wind resources will encourage investment while ensuring projects are built in the right way and in the right places," said Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) Director Michael R. Bromwich. Director Bromwich said BOEMRE is proposing a revision to its regulations, eliminating a redundant and unnecessary step, potentially saving up to 6-12 months in the leasing process.

Wind Energy Areas (WEA) are offshore locations that appear most suitable for wind energy development. Data would continue to be collected for these high priority areas to inform government and industry assessments and planning, allowing a more efficient process for permitting and siting responsible development.

Key aspects of the Atlantic Wind 'Smart from the Start' initiative are modelled on successful efforts that are helping to launch major solar energy projects on US public lands in the West, including a 'Smart from the Start' approach that designated solar energy study areas, conducted early environmental reviews, and is coordinating state and federal permitting processes for large-scale solar projects.

Under the 'Smart from the Start' initiative, BOEMRE will work with state partners to identify WEAs off the coasts of a number of Atlantic states, including Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Virginia, Rhode Island and Massachusetts within the next 60 days.

By January 2011, Requests for Interest and Calls for Information will be issued for these new WEAs to support lease sale environmental assessments. Maryland's Request for Information has already been issued and those for New Jersey, Virginia, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts are being developed. Additional WEAs will be identified in 2011 for other Atlantic States, which may include areas offshore New York, Maine, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

To address the need for transmission infrastructure to bring this offshore power ashore, BOEMRE will move forward aggressively, on a parallel track, to process applications to build offshore transmission lines. The identification of wind energy areas should assist the siting and feasibility reviews associated with potential offshore transmission lines.

This offshore wind initiative is the latest in a series of Administration actions to spur renewable energy development on the Outer Continental Shelf. In early 2009, Salazar expedited the long-delayed process for approving the final rules for offshore wind development, establishing a regulatory framework that encourages responsible development. He then established the Atlantic Wind Consortium and announced the creation of an offshore wind coordinating office to expedite.