

So What? Wind Energy Areas

In November 2010, Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, launched the “Smart from the Start” initiative for the Atlantic coast. This initiative is designed to identify potential wind energy areas where cursory screenings for use conflicts have been completed by facilitating improved coordination among local, state, and federal partners to accelerate the leasing process. A more detailed description of this initiative can be found in this fact sheet (<http://go.usa.gov/fH8>). A Wind Energy Area (WEA) is an offshore area that seems most suitable for wind energy development because of a lack of obvious conflicts with existing uses. Identifying WEAs will expedite the process of leasing an area; however, much more detailed information will still need to be gathered to develop a specific site for construction and operation of an offshore wind facility. Currently there are four WEAs established under the Smart from the Start initiative, all in Mid-Atlantic waters. Other types of areas are now being developed along the Atlantic coast and are described in the “Quick Caveats” section below. These other areas will be updated within the “Wind Planning Areas” data layer on the Multipurpose Marine Cadastre (MMC), unless they are later designated as a WEA.

Why should a wind energy planner use the Wind Energy Areas dataset?

1. **Wind energy task forces lead to conflict resolution.** As part of the “Smart from the Start” initiative, many states have established a wind energy task force to assess the potential for offshore wind and discuss potential conflicts with its development and operation. These task forces have identified many areas where use conflicts may exist and have recommended WEAs in areas that minimize these conflicts.
2. **Wind energy areas identify fatal flaws ahead of time.** WEAs are established to expedite the leasing process for offshore wind energy development. Federal agency partners assess lease blocks on the outer continental shelf to determine fatal flaws in the areas, like military training ranges and active shipping lanes, for example. Areas with no significant use conflicts are more likely to be offered for leasing. (See caveats for more information.)
3. **Assessment results determine next steps in the lease process.** A *Federal Register* Notice (FRN) will be published to solicit additional information or leasing interest in areas recommended by the wind energy task forces. The exact type of notice used depends on the amount and quality of information gathered as part of the wind energy task force assessment. Example notices include a call for interest or request for information. A full list of possibilities is listed below.

Quick Caveats. Once leases are issued, the developer does not automatically have the right to develop. Developers still need to select a specific site and go through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (<http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/>) review of the construction and operation plan they propose. Secretary Salazar assures developers that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) (www.boem.gov/) will work directly with project proponents to determine aggressive schedules with frequent interagency communications.

It is important to note that each state carries out its own processes that result in differing amounts and types of information. Although leases are made in federal waters, the cables will run through state waters, and all construction and operation activities will be reviewed by the states under the consistency provision of the Coastal Zone Management Act (<http://go.usa.gov/fHX>). In some cases there are separate federal and state wind energy task forces that look at different aspects of offshore wind energy development in the coastal waters of a specific state.

Lastly, in addition to the current WEAs, similar processes in states such as Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and North Carolina are ongoing, and task forces are still being formed in a few other states. A request or call for interest is either in the works or pending for all these areas. Once the WEAs are established, BOEM coordinates an environmental assessment to satisfy NEPA requirements before the area is offered for leasing. Other types of notices that could be announced include the following:

Types of Federal Register Notice Announcements*

*Wind planning areas (WPAs) shown in the MMC may encompass any one of these types of areas at any time.

Wind Energy Areas (WEA) are a portion of the outer continental shelf that BOEM identifies as appearing to be suitable for the consideration of wind energy development based on information concerning wind energy potential, natural resources, competing uses, and other relevant issues. This is a term coined by the secretary's "Smart from the Start" initiative. In a competitive leasing process, the term is synonymous with **Area Identification**, which is the area that BOEM identifies as being subject to environmental analysis because it is being considered for leasing.

Request for Information (RFI) applies to areas that BOEM publishes in the *Federal Register* to solicit nominations of interest for leasing and additional information. This is the first step in the planning and leasing process.

Call for Interest (CFI) applies to areas that BOEM publishes in the *Federal Register* to solicit nominations of interest for leasing and additional information. This is the next step in the planning and leasing process, though BOEM may decide to start the process by publishing this notice in certain circumstances (e.g., New Jersey).

Other *Federal Register* Notices include the following:

Request for Competitive Interest (RFCI) applies to areas that BOEM publishes in the *Federal Register* to solicit additional nominations of interest to determine whether competitive interest exists. An RFCI was published for the area offshore of Delaware. BOEM will likely publish a RFCI for the Atlantic Wind Connection project for the proposed right-of-way grant area.

Determination of No Competitive Interest (DNCI) applies to areas that BOEM publishes in the *Federal Register* in which they have determined that no competitive interest exists. A DNCI was published for the area offshore of Delaware.

Proposed Sale Notice (PSN) is a notice BOEM publishes in the *Federal Register* that describes the proposed areas to be offered for leasing and the proposed conditions of a lease sale. This notice would not be published until after the NEPA review had been completed.

Final Sale Notice (FSN) is a notice BOEM publishes in the *Federal Register* that describes the final areas to be offered and the final conditions of a lease sale.

For questions, please contact nos.csc.mmc@noaa.gov.