

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AREA IDENTIFICATION

Commercial Wind Energy Leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf Offshore Massachusetts

May 30, 2012

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is proceeding with competitive commercial wind energy leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) offshore Massachusetts, as set forth by 30 CFR 585.211 through 585.225. The next step in the competitive leasing process, and the purpose of this announcement, is Area Identification. BOEM defined a Wind Energy Area (WEA) offshore Massachusetts pursuant to the Secretary of the Interior's *Smart from the Start* Atlantic Offshore Wind Initiative. This entire area will be considered for leasing and approval of site assessment plans as the proposed action under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4370f). BOEM also has identified alternatives to the proposed action that consider the exclusion of certain portions of the WEA and the issuance of leases and approval of site assessment in the remainder of the WEA. This announcement also identifies mitigation measures and other issues to be considered further in the NEPA document.

On February 6, 2012, BOEM published in the *Federal Register* the *Commercial Leasing for Wind Power on the Outer Continental Shelf Offshore Massachusetts—Call for Information and Nominations* (Call) (77 FR 5820-5830) and *Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment* (NOI) (77 FR 5830-5832).

Figure 1 depicts the “Excluded Area” that will not be considered for leasing or approval of site assessment plans in the NEPA document. The Call included certain areas that overlapped with an area of high sea duck occurrence. BOEM has excluded this “high value” habitat from the WEA, to avoid impacts to this valuable habitat. In addition, the Call included an area that, if ultimately developed with commercial wind energy facilities, would likely cause substantial conflict with “high value” fisheries. This area is a continuation of an area excluded from leasing consideration in the Rhode Island/Massachusetts WEA announced on February 24, 2012. The remainder of the Call Area will be considered for leasing and approval of site assessment plans in an environmental assessment (EA) (see Figure 1, Alternative A).

Alternatives to the proposed action (Alternative A) were defined by excluding certain areas of the WEA because of the following considerations:

- Areas identified as having occurrences of North Atlantic right whales, which are of concern due to potential impacts to this species (see Figure 2, Alternative B);
- All areas within 15 nautical miles of the inhabited coastline of Massachusetts, which are of concern due to potential visual impacts (see Figure 3, Alternative C); and
- All areas within 21 nautical miles of the inhabited coastline of Massachusetts, which are of concern due to potential visual impacts (see Figure 4, Alternative D).

The agency is currently only considering the issuance of leases and approval of site assessment plans in this area. BOEM is not considering, and the EA does not support, any decision(s) regarding the construction and operation of wind energy facilities on leases which will potentially be issued in this WEA. If, after leases are issued, a lessee proposes to construct a commercial wind energy facility, it would submit a construction and operations plan. If and when BOEM receives

such a plan, it would prepare a site-specific NEPA document for the project proposed, which would include the lessee's proposed transmission line(s) to shore. These cable routes would underlie areas outside of the WEA, and may include areas beneath the "high value" sea duck habitat and fishing grounds.

BOEM has also identified mitigation measures that may reduce the potential for adverse impacts to North Atlantic right whales. Such measures include seasonal vessel restrictions, vessel speed restrictions, and enhanced monitoring. These measures, and possibly others, will be analyzed in the EA, and if adopted, could be imposed as binding requirements in the form of stipulations in the lease instrument and/or conditions of approval of a site assessment plan. Based upon staff recommendations; consultations with Federal agencies, states, local governments, and affected Indian tribes; and public comments received, BOEM will continue to consider additional measures that may reduce the potential for adverse environmental consequences, and may identify other issues to be considered in the EA.

Figure 1. Wind Energy Area identified offshore Massachusetts for analysis as the Proposed Action (Alternative A) in the EA.

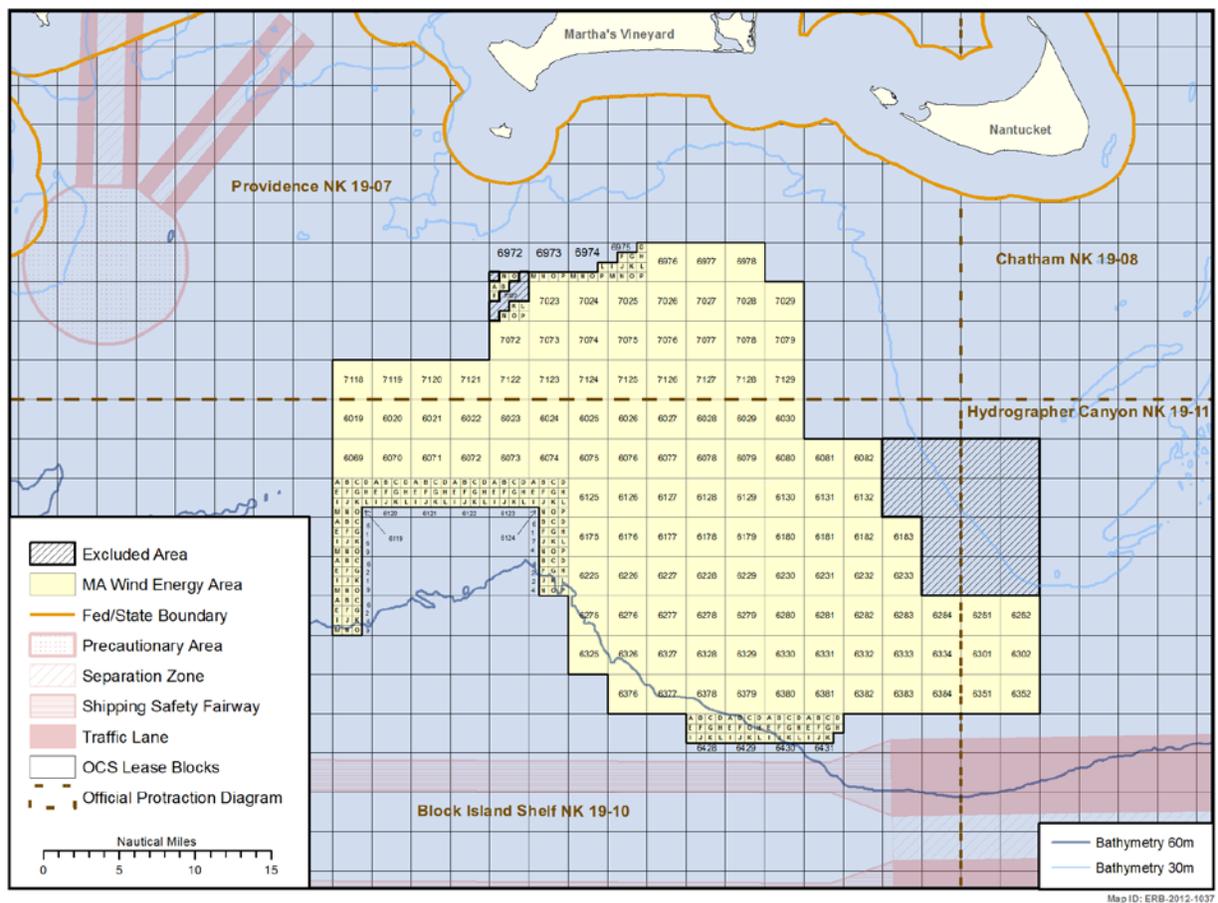
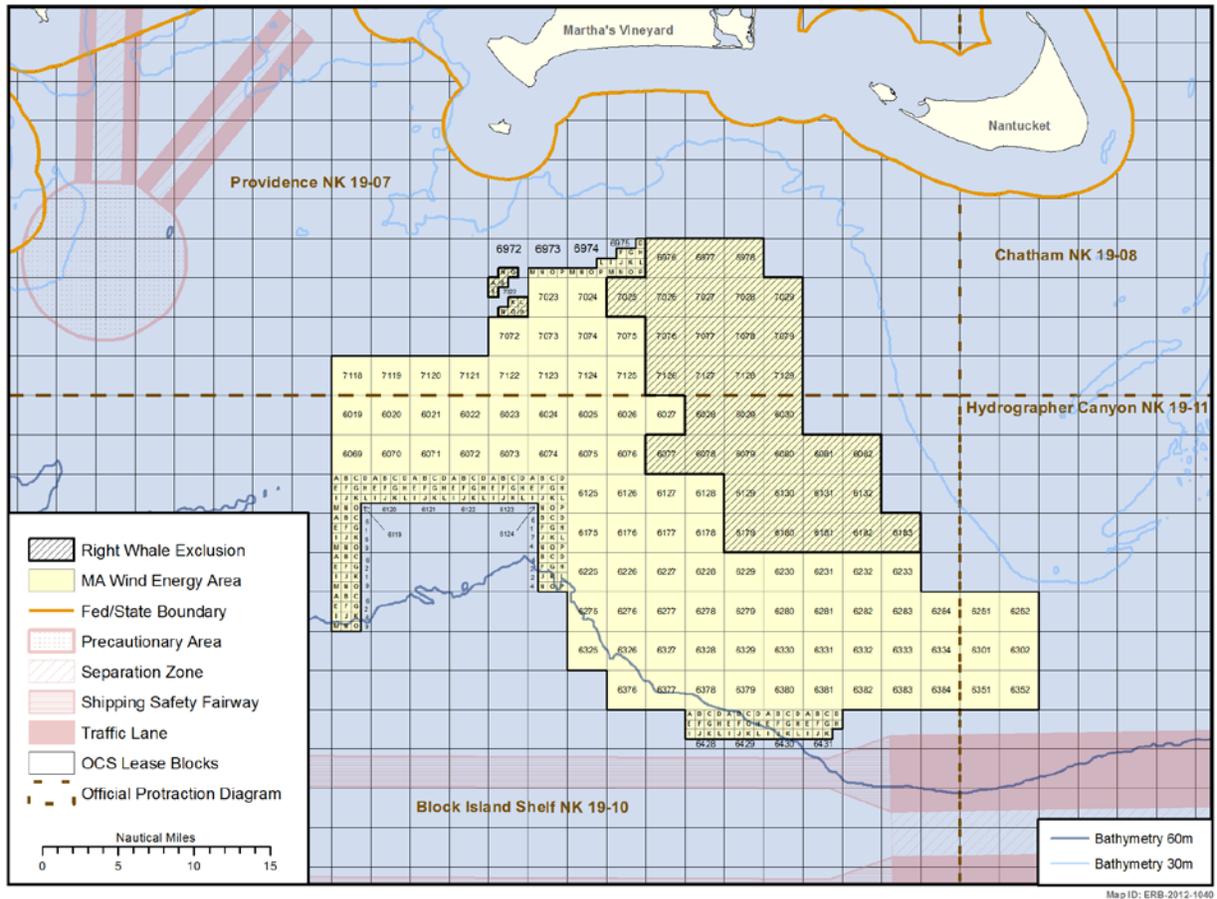
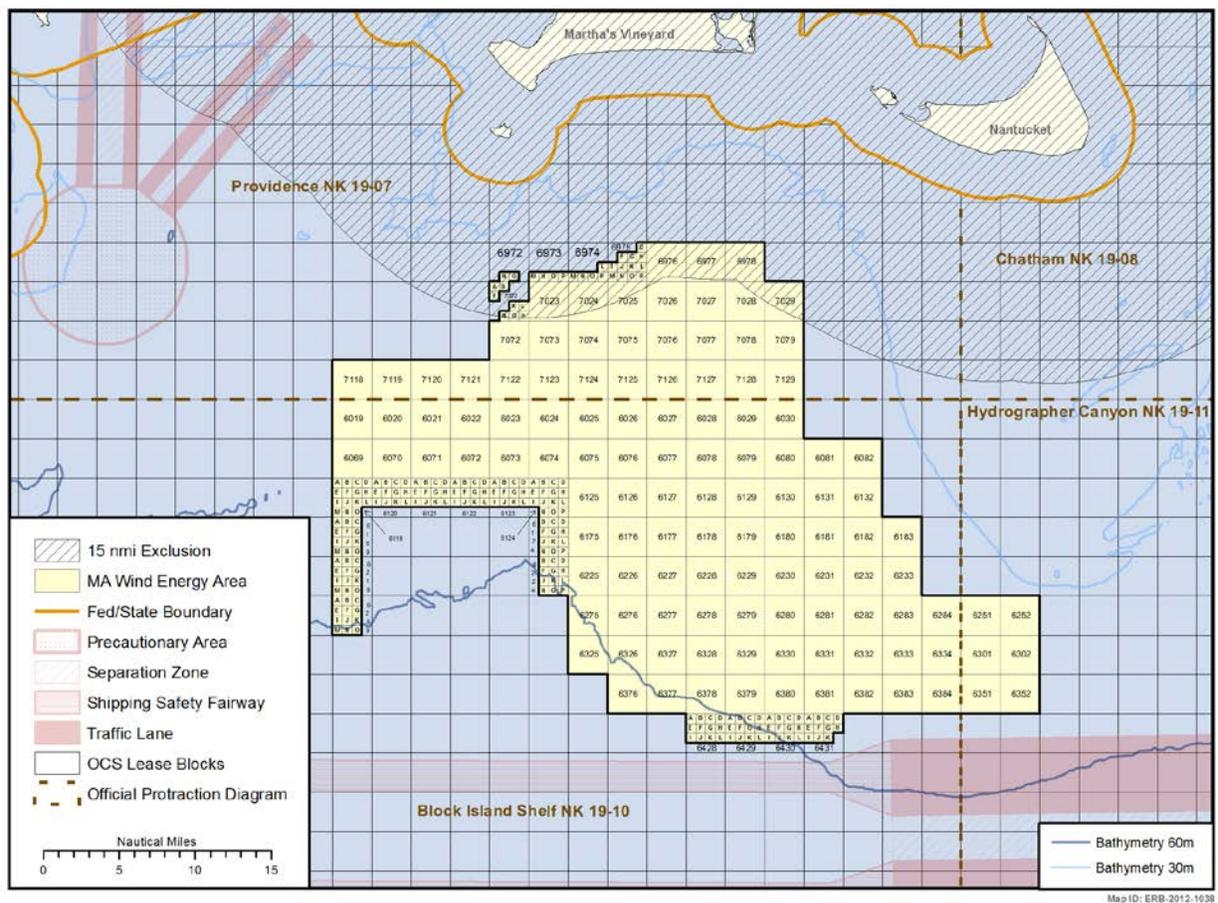


Figure 2. Areas identified as having occurrences of North Atlantic right whales for analysis as Alternative B in the EA.



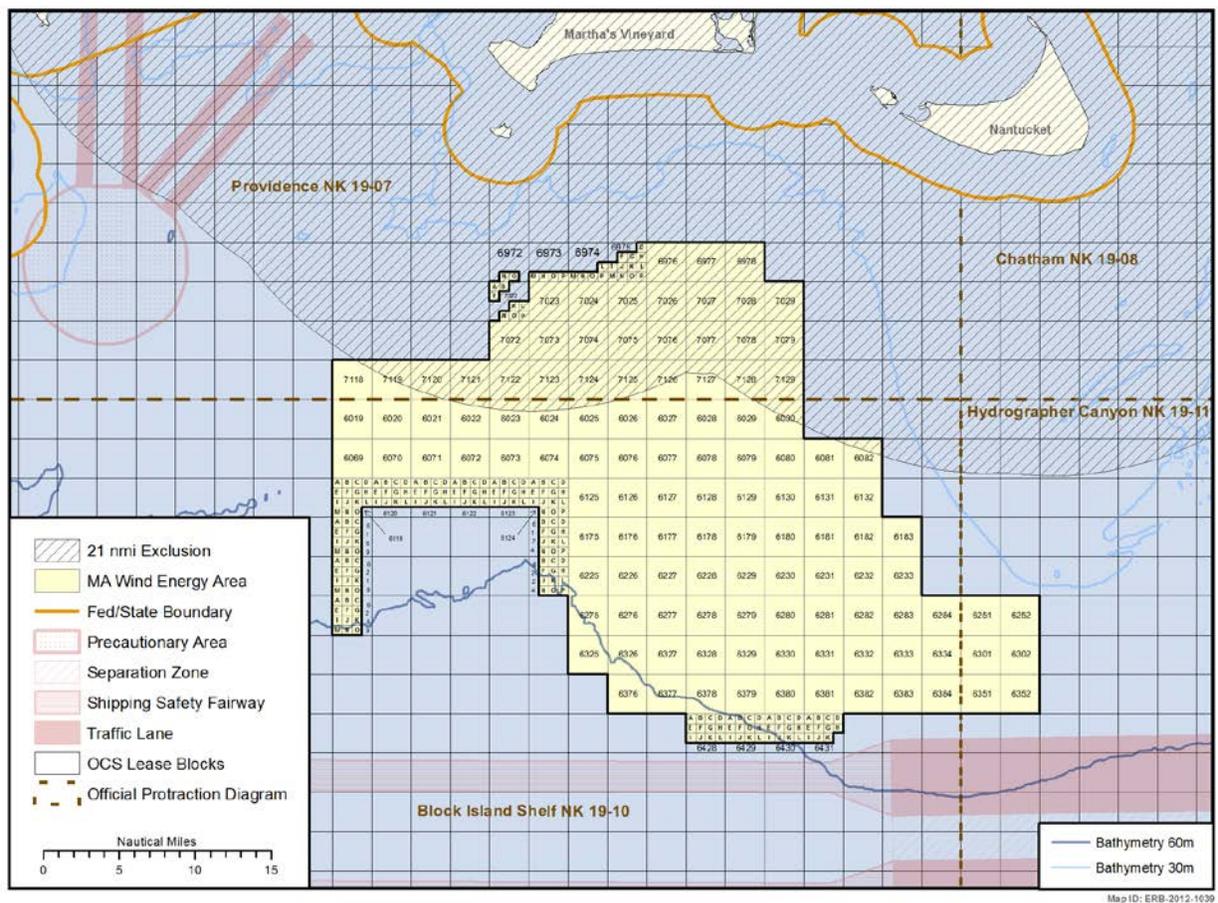
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Figure 3. Areas within 15 nautical miles of the inhabited coastline of Massachusetts identified for analysis as Alternative C in the EA.



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Figure 4. Areas within 21 nautical miles of the inhabited coastline of Massachusetts identified for analysis as Alternative D in the EA.



MapID: ERB-2012-1639