Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
Central Atlantic Renewable Energy Planning Area Development

Meeting with Environmental NGOs
Dec. 15, 2021, 10AM- 12PM via Zoom

Meeting Summary

This meeting summary is not intended to be a complete transcript or record of the meeting proceedings but rather serves to capture the high-level themes and issues discussed.

Meeting Purpose

- Provide information and answer questions about the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) leasing process and the proposed Central Atlantic Renewable Energy Planning Area for offshore wind development off the coast of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina.
- Gather broad feedback and input from members of the environmental and scientific communities on the initial draft Central Atlantic Renewable Energy Planning Area.

Welcome and Introductions

Jim Bennett, Program Manager for Renewable Energy Programs at BOEM, welcomed participants and provided an overview of the agency's responsibilities and clean energy goals. He discussed the meeting purpose, highlighting the agency's interest in obtaining input as part of the draft Central Atlantic Renewable Energy Planning Area identification, discussing ocean uses and biological and physical resources within the draft planning area, and facilitating a conversation about collaboration opportunities between BOEM and the environmental community.

Mr. Bennett emphasized the agency's commitment to increased transparency and collaboration with stakeholders by engaging with stakeholder groups early in development process to identify potential impacts and avoid conflicts. He shared that BOEM has adopted a regional approach to stakeholder engagement and will invite input from stakeholders and the public several more times throughout the process. He explained that BOEM operating with a sense of urgency to face the challenges of the climate crisis and is committed to protecting marine resources and using science to guide their decisions. In closing, Mr. Bennet thanked participants for their attendance, noting that their feedback is vital to BOEM's decision-making process.

Patrick Field, a facilitator with the Consensus Building Institute, welcomed attendees and thanked them for their participation. Thirty-six (36) people registered for the meeting. Mr. Field provided an overview of the meeting agenda and sharedthe following information about the meeting:

- The meeting was intended to be a conversation between BOEM and maritime industry members and representatives. Other attendees were asked to remain in listen-only
- Participation in this discussion is not an endorsement of offshore wind or developmentof these specific wind energy areas (WEAs).
- Meeting summaries will be drafted without attribution to participants and shared with meeting attendees.

Presentations

Overview of BOEM's Renewable Energy Development Process and the Central Atlantic Draft Planning Area

Bridgette Duplantis, Program Analyst at BOEM, introduced the Central Atlantic Planning Area off the Atlantic Coast between Delaware and Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The draft planning area begins over 20 miles away from shore and ends approximately 81 miles from shore. She provided an overview of BOEM's four stage renewable energy leasing and areas identification process. She explained that the Central Atlantic Planning Area process is early in the Planning and Analysis phase and that the planning area will be winnowed down into a smaller Call Area and subsequent Lease Areas later in the process. BOEM has not set a goal for how many acres will be available for leasing at the end of the planning process. She discussed the various stakeholder and public outreach activities associated with the project which will include a Central Atlantic Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force Meeting on February 16, 2022.

Ms. Duplantis explained that the draft Planning Area has already been winnowed down to three smaller areas to avoid conflicts with existing uses and impacts to biological resources, particularly those near Atlantic Canyons and the Outer Continental Shelf break, and USCG proposed shipping safety fairways that overlap with the draft planning area. She noted that BOEM is in constant communication with USCG and will continue to collaborate with them as the proposals are developed. While a 10-year federal moratorium on offshore wind development off the coast of North Carolina will go into effect in 2022, Ms. Duplantis shared that the State of North Carolina requested that BOEM move forward to analyze the area and identify wind energy areas off the coast for future leasing when and if the moratorium expires. This moratorium does not apply to the Kitty Hawk WEA which is already under lease.

Birds

David Bigger, BOEM, presented maps showing the annual relative density of four different seabirds overlaid onto the draft planning area to illustrate the types of data related to birds that BOEM uses in their decision-making process. He shared distribution maps showing the relative density of black-capped petrel, northern gannet, red-throated loon, and surf scoter that were developed from models developed by the Marine-Life Data and Analysis Team (MDAT) at Duke University's Marine Geospatial Ecology Lab using survey data from over 100 scientific studies. He explained that the MDAT models show close to 50 species by season and said that it will be updated by summer. Mr. Bigger explained that BOEM is also reviewing their study on the behavior of diving birds up and down the coast and will include other species of concern and birds with the potential to be listed as endangered species in their analysis. Before concluding his presentation, he acknowledged the discussed some of the technical challenges to gathering flight information on land-based birds because most of the beacons that receive data from nano-tag transmitters are located on at this time almost solely shoreside.

Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles

Kyle Baker, BOEM, discussed the types of marine mammal and sea turtle data that BOEM is considering in the development process. He presented maps showing areas near and within the draft planning area that are designated as Coastal Critical Habitat areas for Loggerhead Sea Turtles and the relative density of cetaceans and marine mammals in the low and mid frequency hearing groups such as baleen whales, most delphinid species, beaked whales, and sperm whales.

Mr. Baker presented slides about North Atlantic Right Whales (NARW) which showed that that the western draft planning area overlaps with right whale occurrence. Maps displaying the predicted densities of right whales in January and June indicate that predicted densities are lower in non-winter months as the whales move north although other data gathered by acoustic detections indicate that right whale presence may occur year-round in these areas. Mr. Baker shared that BOEM is discussing baseline data collection and monitoring in future lease areas before, during, and after construction of offshore wind developments in these areas BOEM hopes to better understand the impacts offshore wind developments on NARW through that work .When asked a question about how BOEM is considering the impacts of climate change and rising temperatures on NAWR behavior and migration patterns, Mr. Baker explained that climate change impacts can be predicted but they need to be monitored and tracked overtime to be fully understood.

Fish

Brandon Jensen, BOEM, shared some of the data that BOEM is using to analyze fish habitats and fishing industry activities within the draft planning area. He explained that fishing revenue data shows fishing activity concentrated in the northern areas near a sea scallop rotational area (which has been removed from the draft planning area already) and identified some Habitat Areas of Particular Concern for rare and vulnerable fish that have also been excluded from the draft planning area already.

Discussion

After Bridgette Duplantis concluded the presentation with a summary of project milestones, next steps, and upcoming opportunities to provide public input, Patrick Field invited attendees to share feedback and questions. Several attendees shared comments and questions with the project team on a range of issues. Key issues and main concerns raised in the discussion are summarized below:

Draft Planning Area Boundaries

- Concerns that the southern end of one of the eastern planning areas overlaps with the gulf stream and important currents and will require some higher scrutiny.
- Observations that the southern end of the draft planning area also overlaps with the OCS break, areas that see high densities of black cap petrel, and some important fish habitat areas.

Birds

- Concerns about the potential impacts of offshore wind development to land-based birds

that cross the OCS during trans-Atlantic migration or during annual migration between wintering areas in South America and breeding areas in North America, specifically areas in the Delaware Bay and Eastern Shore of Virginia.

- Requests that BOEM consider additional bird species in their analysis including:
    - True pelagic species in the region such as Cahow, Shearwaters, Storm petrels, Arctic Tern, Roseate Tern, and Tropicbirds
    - Low data species with strong records from this region such as Feas Petrel, Trinidade Petrel, etc.
    - Additional species including Bermuda Petrel, Snow Petrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Rufa subspecies, Red Knot, Cow, Long-tailed Duck, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, other Scoter species, both Eider species, and Blackpoll Warblers.
- Recommendations that BOEM be very clear about the existing gaps in data about birds in the offshore environment and the potential risks to those birds when discussing potential impacts of offshore wind.
- BOEM should consider both MDAT models and telemetry studies because they identify sometimes different presence and absence of various species.

Marine Mammals

- Concerns that the mammals with most potential risk in the Mid-Atlantic lean towards the bottlenose dolphins rather than the NARW. BOEM staff shared that they will look at dolphins more closely and invited attendees to share any information they had about individual stocks.

Fish and Fishing

- A suggestion that BOEM analyze the potential impacts of offshore wind development on forage fish uses.

Transmission Lines

- Some attendees raised questions about coordinating with nearby offshore wind developers to minimize impacts of transmission lines and the development of an offshore power transmission infrastructure “backbone” within the current federal regulatory framework. David MacDuffee, Chief of Projects and Coordination at BOEM, shared that BOEM is working with other federal agencies and stakeholders to explore this issue on a larger scale including what issues related to onshore infrastructure, capacity of the power grid, and connection points as well as the offshore environments. He explained that existing developments are proposing radial connections through an easement and that proposed cable routes will be included in the Construction and Operations Plan (COP) for future developments. He did not that in this early stage of planning, specific transmission routes are not explored.

Environmental Impact Analysis

- Several attendees expressed support for a comprehensive National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) review in the form of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) during the early planning stage to further consider transmission siting,

enable stakeholder input, identify conflict areas early in the process, and ensure alternatives for WEAs are vetted. Helen Rucker, BOEM, emphasized that all the information and feedback BOEM is gathering now will be considered and included in an Environmental Assessment (EA) which will take place after the wind energy area has been identified. She explained that BOEM will not have enough information to analyze specific environmental impacts of the proposed development until after a Construction and Operations Plan (COP) is submitted.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

- Appreciation for the opportunity to engage with BOEM early in the development process.
- Support for BOEM engaging with local communities outside of the task forces.

Process Timeline

- Concerns that providing 15 days for participants to submit additional written feedback during the holidays is inadequate and does not indicate a genuine interest in building buy-in.
- Concerns that the data from ongoing and upcoming telemetry studies and surveys will not be completed in time to inform the planning decisions for the Central Atlantic Renewable Energy Development process.

Conclusion

Patrick Field invited participants to share additional comments via email along with a reminder that a formal public comment period for the project would take place after the task force meeting in February. He shared that the project team will share the presentation slides and meeting summary with participations.

Jim Bennet, BOEM, shared thanked attendees for their time, comments, and questions.