BOEM
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

# North Atlantic Right Whale and Offshore Wind Strategy

## Overview

On January 25, 2024, BOEM and NOAA Fisheries released the final joint strategy to protect and promote the recovery of endangered North Atlantic right whales while responsibly developing offshore wind energy. It was developed to support the Biden-Harris administration's goal of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030.

The strategy identifies the agencies' goals and key actions for continuing to evaluate and mitigate the potential effects of offshore wind energy development on North Atlantic right whales and their habitat. It also builds on existing mitigation measures to protect North Atlantic right whales from the potential impacts of offshore wind development.

BOEM and NOAA Fisheries incorporated the best available scientific information and Tribal and public feedback in the strategy. Working with NOAA Fisheries on this strategy leverages the resources and expertise of both agencies to collect and apply the best available information to inform our future decisions.

The **North Atlantic Right Whale and Offshore Wind Strategy** provides guidance for a coordinated effort across the federal government and with other partners to protect and promote the recovery of North Atlantic right whales while responsibly developing offshore wind energy to address the climate crisis.

The final strategy identifies 50 actions, 15 of which are priority, under three main goals:

1) mitigation and decision-support tools
2) research and monitoring
3) collaboration, communication, and outreach.

These goals and actions will allow:

- continued, coordinated, and efficient collaborations between BOEM, NOAA Fisheries and our partners.
- collection and application of the best available scientific information and data insights to inform future decisions, including monitoring and mitigation programs.
- identification of effective measures to reduce risk and avoid and minimize impacts to North Atlantic right whales.

# FAQs

**Is the strategy final?**
Yes, the strategy is final but will be evaluated and updated as new information becomes available.

**Does the strategy anticipate any new requirements on industry?**
The strategy does not specifically require new measures. Instead, it provides a general description of preliminary measures that BOEM and NOAA Fisheries agree may have potential to avoid and minimize impacts to right whales from offshore wind activities. The agencies are sharing these measures to communicate the types of requirements that regulatory agencies and project proponents should consider for individual projects. These measures will also be considered during project-specific plan reviews.

**What impacts will the strategy have on current OSW projects?**
The strategy is unlikely to impact currently operating OSW projects, or those under construction, given those authorizations and their included mitigation and monitoring requirements have already been issued.

**Could the strategy result in existing OSW leases being cancelled or reassessed?**
We do not expect the strategy to result in the amendment or cancellation of any existing leases.

**Are any parts of the strategy enforceable?**
No, the strategy itself is not binding on the agency or third parties, and instead provides guidelines for the development of downstream measures that may themselves be enforceable.

**What are the potential offshore wind impacts to North Atlantic right whales?**
**Noise exposure:** Sound-producing activities have the potential to result in hearing impairment, masking of right whale vocal communication, physiological impacts (e.g., stress), and/or behavioral disturbance.

**Vessel strikes:** All vessels have the potential to strike North Atlantic right whales. Offshore wind activities may displace vessels from lease areas and into areas used more frequently by right whales.

**Entanglement:** Offshore wind activities may produce marine debris or involve accessories which may cause entanglement or displace fishing activity into right whale higher use areas.

**Habitat changes:** Offshore wind development may result in habitat changes that may displace whales or affect the abundance, quality, or availability of whale prey (e.g., changes in ocean circulation and mixing from in-water structures, including turbines and foundations, and impingement or entrainment of prey in cooling water intakes associated with High Voltage Direct Current cable systems) or attract predators (e.g., predators with an affinity for a new “reef structure” in the environment).