

## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF AREA IDENTIFICATION**

### **Commercial Wind Energy Leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf Offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts**

**February 24, 2012**

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is proceeding with competitive commercial wind energy leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) offshore Rhode Island and 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 Rhode Island and 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 entail considering the exclusion of certain portions of the WEA and the issuance of leases and approval of site assessment in the remaining portions. This announcement also identifies mitigation measures and other issues to be considered further in the NEPA document.

On August 18, 2011, BOEM published in the *Federal Register* the *Commercial Leasing for Wind Power on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts-Call for Information and Nominations (Call)* (76 FR 51383-51391) and *Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment (NOI)* (76 FR 51391-51393). The area identified in the Call and NOI is located within the Area of Mutual Interest (AMI), as described by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Governors of Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

The Call included certain areas that, if ultimately developed with commercial wind energy facilities, would likely cause substantial conflict with existing fishing uses. BOEM has excluded these "high value" fishing grounds from the WEA. Therefore, these areas will not be considered for leasing or approval of site assessment plans in this NEPA document. 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). Figure 1 depicts the high value fishing grounds removed from leasing consideration as "Excluded Area."

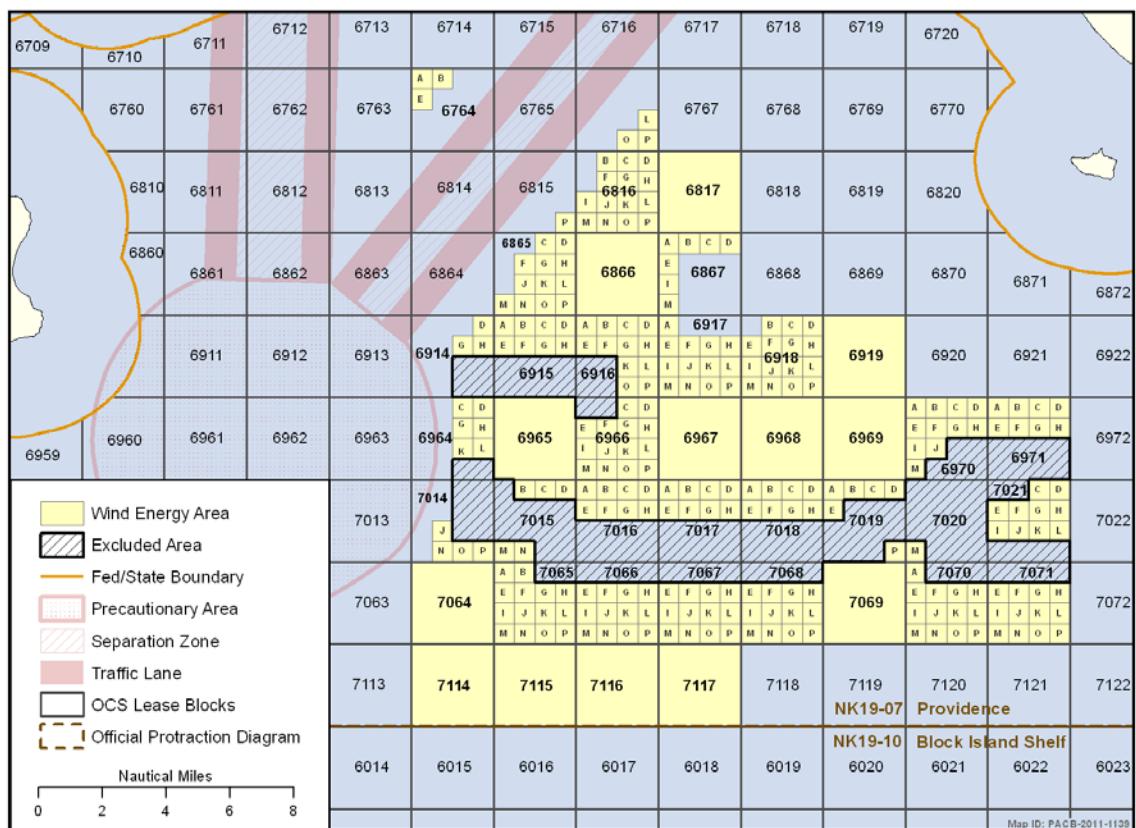
Alternatives to the proposed action (Alternative A) were defined by excluding certain areas of the WEA because of the following considerations:

- 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)
- 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); and
- All areas identified by Verizon Communications Inc. as containing telecommunication cable(s), which are of concern due to potential interference or other impacts (see Figure 5, Alternative E).

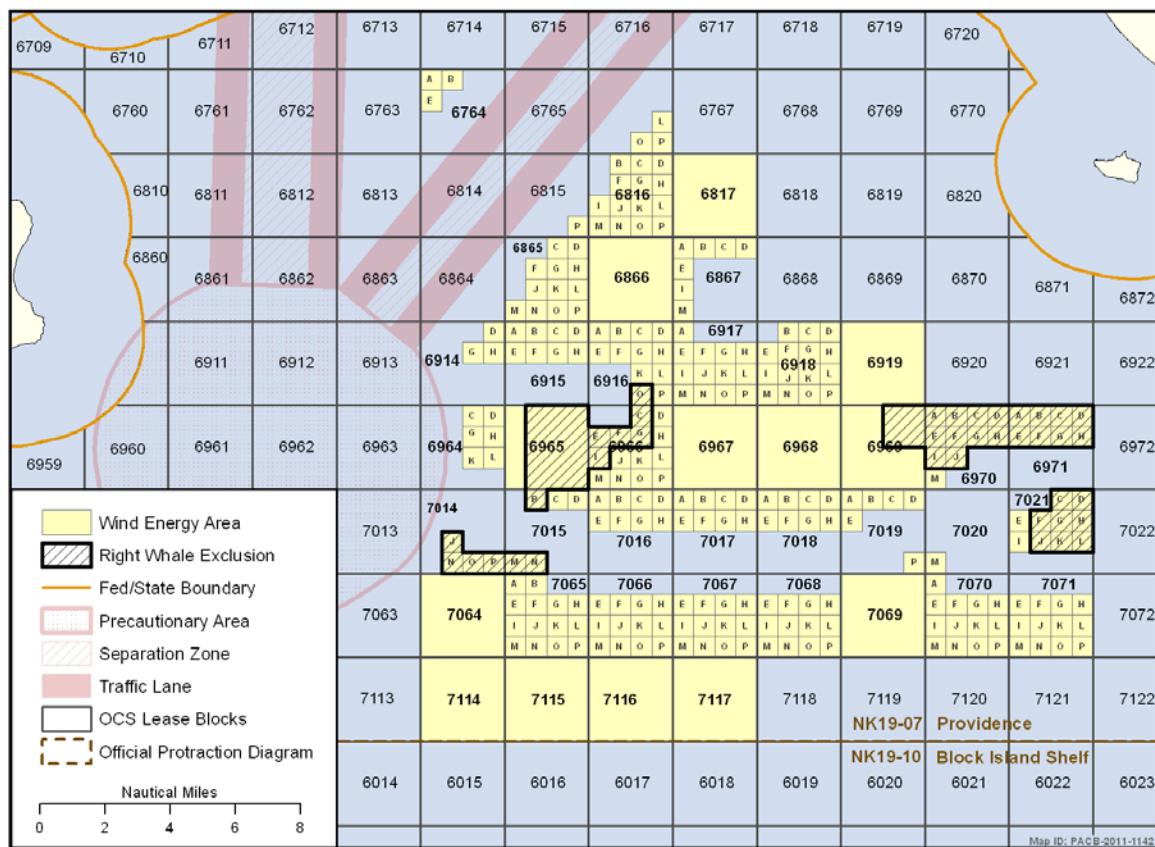
The agency is currently only considering the issuance of leases and approval of site assessment plans in this area. BOEM is not considering, and the EA does not support, any decision(s) regarding the construction and operation of any wind energy facility on leases that may be issued in this WEA. If, 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, that 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 these "high value" 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 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.

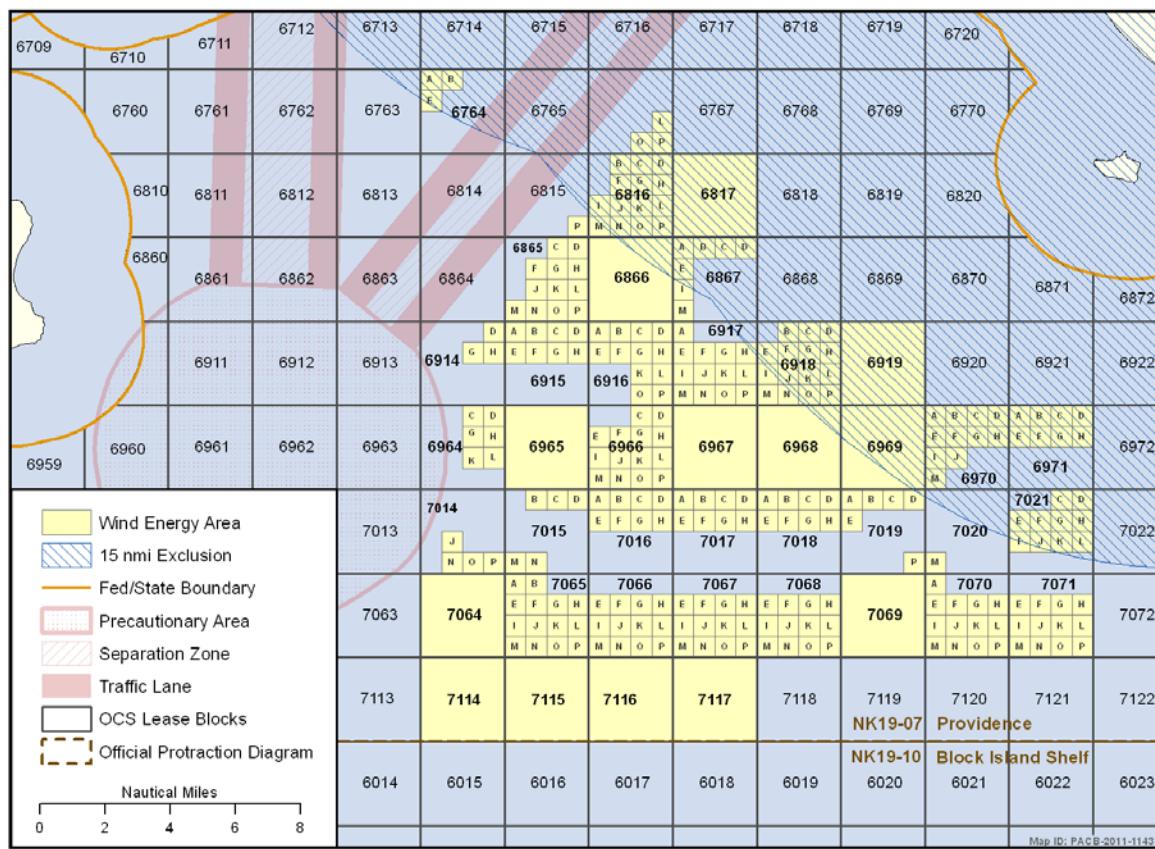
**Figure 1. Wind Energy Area identified offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts for analysis as the Proposed Action (Alternative A) in the EA.**



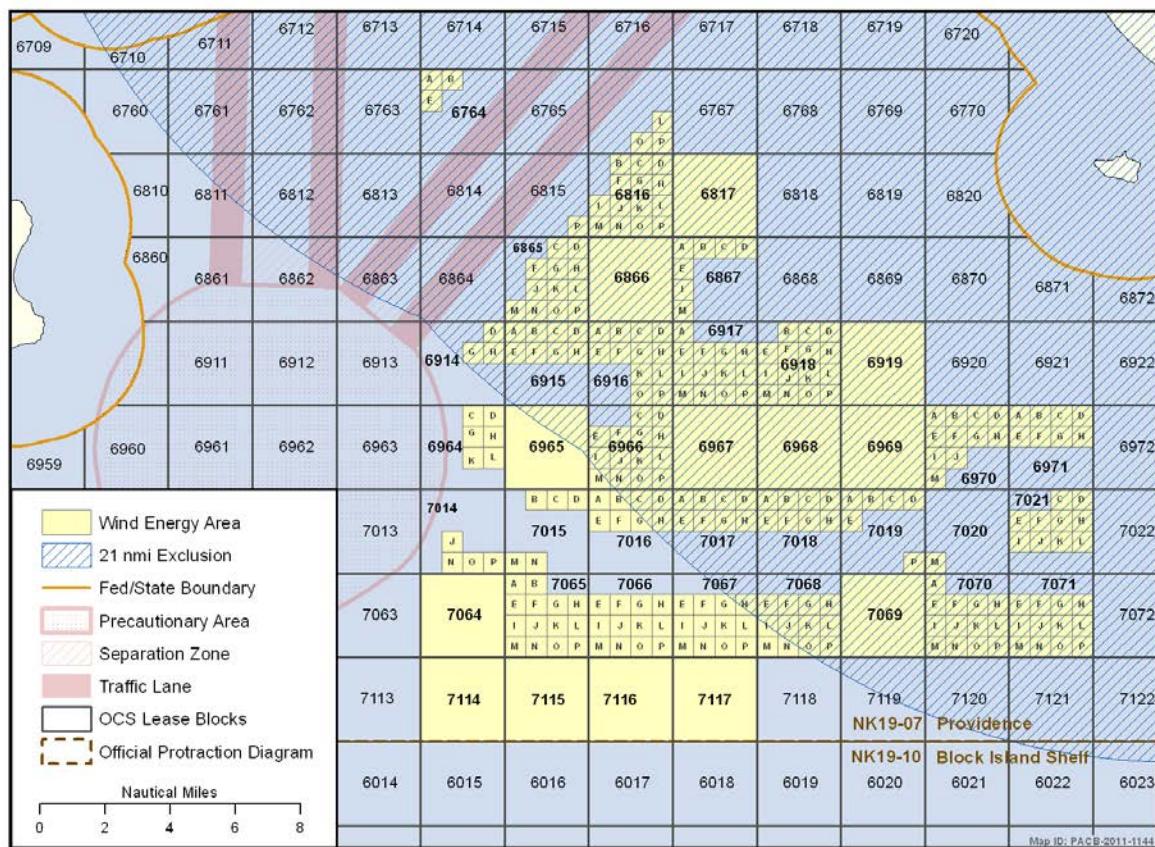
**Figure 2. Areas identified as having occurrences of North Atlantic right whales for analysis as Alternative B in the EA.**



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



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



**Figure 5. Areas identified by Verizon, Inc. as containing telecommunication cable(s) identified as Alternative E in the EA.**

