

Federal offshore wind plan -- \$50.5 million in research funding

Tiffany Hsu, Los Angeles Times, 2-7-11

The yachts and gulls might need to make some room off the mid-Atlantic coast for the offshore wind turbines that the government is hoping to soon install.

Federal agencies are jumping on the goal that President Obama set in his State of the Union address last month, aiming to derive 80% of all electricity generation across the country from clean energy sources by 2035.

Secretary of Energy Steven Chu and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar paired up Monday to announce a new game plan that will set up a network of wind turbines off the Eastern seaboard potentially by the end of the year.

The government will offer \$50.5 million in funding for research and development over the next five years and identified potential sites on the outer continental shelf off of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Virginia.

Wind projects in those areas will probably enjoy a fast-tracked permitting process. The agencies also plan to pinpoint similar areas off Massachusetts, Rhode Island and North Carolina this spring.

Though officials acknowledged the barriers to offshore wind development -- high costs, technical challenges, difficulty setting up transmission, lack of site data -- they said they hoped to begin offering leases for potential facilities as early as the end of this year.

Officials expect to eventually tap locations in the Pacific, the Gulf of Mexico, the Great Lakes and off Hawaii, resulting in 10 gigawatts in offshore wind capacity by the end of the decade and 54 gigawatts by 2030.

Offshore wind energy could provide enough electricity to power the country four times over, said Sean Garren, clean-energy advocate for Environment America, in a statement.

“By harnessing a fraction of the immense, available wind resources off our coast, we can reduce global warming emissions, create local good-paying jobs and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels,” he said.

There are no offshore wind farms in the U.S., where the concept of electricity coming from gusty sea breezes has drawn interest from supporters such as Google and ire from some coastal residents who worry that the technology could affect the local fishing industry and detract from views.