

# Easing offshore challenges, officials hope for more turbines 'soon'

Daniel Cusick, *Environment & Energy Publishing*, 9-12-16

Tradition holds that when the Energy and Interior secretaries leave Washington to tout a major energy play, it usually involves a mineral deposit, oil and gas field, or renewable energy site in the Interior West, where the government's resource management footprint is large and highly visible.

But last week, officials revealed that the nation's largest untapped energy resource is nowhere near the Bakken Shale oil patch of North Dakota, the coal fields of Wyoming or the sun-soaked California desert.

Instead, it's just off the Eastern Seaboard, where 86 gigawatts of wind energy is waiting to be tapped by private developers with the help of government agencies, according to the Obama administration.

On Friday, Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and Interior Secretary Sally Jewell traveled to Boston to punctuate the importance of Atlantic offshore wind.

The Cabinet members pointed to the recent completion of the nation's first U.S. offshore wind farm, at Block Island, R.I., as a milestone in U.S. clean energy development. And they backed their enthusiasm for offshore wind with a policy blueprint they say will allow the country to take full advantage of the Atlantic coast's huge offshore wind resource.

Much of the focus of the "National Offshore Wind Strategy" is on driving down costs, removing red tape from project permitting and helping address challenges to integrating offshore wind resources into regional electricity grids, according to the document (*Greenwire*, Sept. 9).

The strategy also calls for continued research on the environmental costs and benefits of offshore wind power, while advocating for clearer policies to help the wind power industry gain a foothold in the unfamiliar waters of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

While offshore wind is already a robust energy sector in Europe and is moving quickly toward a scale-up in Asia, the United States has been much slower to embrace the resource, focusing instead on land-based wind farms that now account for more than 75 GW of installed capacity.

Renewable energy critics and free-market economists have noted that there's a reason for offshore wind's slow growth in the United States. It is considerably more expensive to deliver power from offshore wind turbines than from those built onshore, and operational and environmental challenges loom large, including concerns about aesthetics and the destructive power of hurricanes and tropical storms that occasionally chew up the U.S. Atlantic coast.

Offshore wind advocates say such challenges can be mitigated through technology advancement, proper siting and scaling, and commercialization of new technologies that drive down costs and strengthen wind farm infrastructure to help turbines withstand the wind and wave action created by tropical storms.

The secretaries' visit to Boston was about signaling to industry officials and renewable energy advocates that the administration has been actively engaged on such questions and intends to do more.

"Offshore wind has experienced enormous progress during the Obama administration," Moniz said, noting that since 2011, DOE has allocated nearly \$200 million in research and development grants to promote offshore wind energy on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and in the Great Lakes.

Jewell, who is responsible for federal leasing of offshore wind sites through the department's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, said that expanding access in federal waters to wind energy development is critical to advancing the Obama administration's Climate Action Plan, which calls for federal permitting of 20 GW of new renewable energy projects by 2020.

She credited government, community stakeholders and private-sector partners for establishing "the first federal offshore wind energy program in the history of the U.S." and pledged that her agency will work to ensure that last month's completion of \$300 million Block Island wind farm signals to other developers that the government is open for business.

"We've made important strides," Jewell told officials gathered at the Wind Technology Testing Center in Boston's Charlestown neighborhood, according to a report in *The Boston Globe*. "We're very hopeful we'll see steel in the ground again, beyond what's happened at Block Island, relatively soon."

The secretaries were joined in Boston by a handful of senior energy policy aides and public and private-sector wind energy officials. They included Dan Utech, the White House deputy assistant to the president for energy and climate change; Abigail Ross Hopper, director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management; and Jose Zayas, the Energy Department's director of wind energy technologies.

Friday's events were welcomed by wind energy industry officials, clean energy advocates and state and regional officials who have helped make New England a leader in offshore wind, going back more than a decade when the first East Coast wind farm was proposed off Cape Cod in Nantucket Sound.

That project, called Cape Wind, remains mired in a federal lawsuit, and its fate remains unclear as BOEM and other federal regulators go back and redo key environmental reviews (*Greenwire*, July 5).

But in its wake have come new projects. They include the Block Island Wind Farm, developed by Providence, R.I.-based Deepwater Wind LLC, and DONG Energy's 1,000-megawatt Bay State Wind project, to be built on a federally leased tract off Martha's Vineyard, Mass., in the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean. That project and others will benefit from a new Massachusetts clean energy law requiring that utilities procure 1,600 MW of electricity from offshore wind farms by 2027 (*ClimateWire*, Aug. 2).

Nancy Sopko, manager of advocacy and federal legislative affairs for the American Wind Energy Association, said in a statement that the new federal strategy puts the United States "on a path to a brighter energy future — to the benefit of communities who will see cleaner air and American manufacturing that will help build, operate and maintain these wind farms."