

Louisiana Takes Major Steps Towards Offshore Wind Energy Initiatives

Milling Benson Woodward LLP. Attorney Andrew Wilson Emphasizes Environmental Implications

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, UNITED STATES, August 15, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the momentum for renewable energy grows in the U.S., Louisiana is making a significant leap forward, with initiatives in offshore wind energy at both federal and state levels. The question is whether Louisiana is moving too fast.

[Andrew Wilson](#), a seasoned attorney at [Milling Benson Woodward LLP](#), shares insights on recent developments, stating, "While many areas around the country are still in the planning stages on offshore wind energy initiatives, Louisiana appears poised to launch major efforts on both federal and state levels."



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"On July 20, 2023, the Department of the Interior announced its first-ever offshore wind energy lease sale in the Gulf of Mexico," elaborated Wilson. This monumental auction by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) set for August 29, 2023, encompasses areas with the capacity to produce an impressive 3.7 GW. This could light up nearly 1.3 million homes with clean, renewable energy. The regions up for auction include a significant 102,480-acre tract in federal offshore waters off Lake Charles, Louisiana. The Department of the Interior's vision is grand, targeting the deployment of 30 GW of offshore wind energy by 2030 and envisioning a carbon-free electricity sector by 2035.

However, while this leap holds promise, it doesn't come without challenges. As Wilson points out, "Many birds are adversely affected by wind turbines due to displacement, barrier effects, and direct injuries. This is especially concerning considering that some of the world's most significant migratory bird pathways run through Louisiana."

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Elsewhere, BOEM's federal program has proceeded with caution, ensuring environmental considerations are at the forefront. Comprehensive Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) have been crucial in assessing potential impacts on marine and avian life well before the projects are built. But with all these necessary studies, it may take up to seven years for BOEM to issue a record of decision so as to allow a wind project to proceed. As a result, at present there are only two operating turbines standing in federal waters, off Virginia, and they are primarily experimental in nature.,

In contrast, some State programs are moving ahead more swiftly. The Block Island Wind Farm, built in 2016 off the coast of R.I., already boasts five operational turbines. Louisiana fabrication yards played a significant role in its construction, which promises a bright future for the state's involvement in such initiatives. Notably, the Ohio Supreme Court recently approved the unique Icebreaker Wind Project on Lake Erie, marking a significant milestone for offshore wind facilities in freshwater bodies.

Meanwhile, Louisiana is moving at a rapid pace of its own. Governor John Bel Edwards recently expressed optimism about the establishment of wind turbines in Louisiana state waters ahead of the federal counterparts further offshore. With state negotiations already underway with companies like Mitsubishi-owned Diamond Offshore Wind, Kontiki Winds, and global energy firm Vestas, Louisiana's nearshore areas in multiple parishes may soon come to fruition.

But concerns linger. In 2022, legislation passed that sought to kickstart Louisiana's wind energy ambitions. Yet, the state's approach to environmental considerations has been viewed by some as backwards, as the intent seems to be to conduct limited environmental studies after rather than before leasing. This issue, coupled with undisclosed negotiations with private entities, has raised flags about the lack of transparency.

Given the state's rich avian biodiversity and crucial migratory pathways, many environmental NGOs advocate for a more thorough approach to site selection and studies beforehand. They've called for in-depth studies using advanced technologies to ensure minimal environmental disruption. With the current trajectory, there's growing apprehension about potential litigation that could bring Louisiana's budding wind energy aspirations to a dead calm.

In the midst of this evolving landscape, striking a balance between development and environmental conservation remains paramount. Only time will tell how Louisiana addresses the challenge at hand.

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