

WIND RUSH

The Rhode Island-based trawler *Virginia Marise* passes through the Deepwater Wind array about four miles off Block Island.



As states fight offshore drilling, fishermen push to influence the Trump administration's embrace of offshore wind energy

By Kirk Moore

The first wind energy turbines outside New York Harbor are still just designs on computers, and ghostly twirling images on navigation simulators that imagine a changed seascape.

Norway-based Statoil ASA would build the towering high-tech windmills on a 79,350 acre-federal lease dubbed Empire Wind, tucked between the traffic separation lanes that ships follow in and out from the harbor approaches at Ambrose Light.

It will be well into the 2020s before they are built. But the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is already

looking beyond, toward leasing more sea floor to wind power companies, up to 100 miles away from the city.

When fisherman Russ Lovgren looks at the bureau's conceptual charts, he sees his family's livelihood disappearing. One of the agency's latest "call areas" — swaths of ocean that the bureau is studying to learn if wind power is feasible — is labeled Hudson North, an immense triangle extending east from the Statoil lease along the north side of the Hudson Canyon.

"About 40 to 50 percent of my work is in Hudson North," Lovgren told bureau officials at a May 8 meeting with

fishermen at Monmouth University in New Jersey. "I'm leaving this meeting and taking the boat out tonight.

"I don't know if my children will be able to do this," Lovgren said of the business that has employed four generations of his family.

His father, Jim Lovgren, a longtime captain with the Fishermen's Dock Co-operative in Point Pleasant Beach, N.J., and 2006 *NF* Highliner, said he tried to warn the bureau three years ago about the Statoil lease, showing officials chart plots that showed how much co-op vessels fish in that area.

The lease, he said, "still went through. It's like talking to a wall."

With developers, states and the federal government moving faster toward exploiting wind energy, bureau officials

say they are trying to do better at understanding and heading off conflicts with the fishing industry.

"I think we've turned the corner on costs; we've turned the corner on industry interest," said Jim Bennett, manager of the bureau's renewable energy program, as it held a series of May meetings in the region with fishermen, state agencies and other interests. "We also realize it affects a lot of people who make a living off the ocean."

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has leased 11 areas off the East Coast, said Bennett. Survey vessels based at New Bedford, Mass., are probing the sea floor south of Martha's Vineyard, where three developers — Deepwater Wind, Bay State Wind and Vineyard Wind — obtained adjoining federal leases on the outer continental shelf. State governments from Massachusetts to Maryland are pushing plans to make offshore wind turbines a major part of their power supply.

Now the Trump administration appears committed to that approach, adopting the "all of the above" attitude of Obama administration energy policy, even while undoing parts that made the Atlantic off-limits for oil and gas drilling. The bureau is looking at offering another 390,000 acres for lease off Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

In April 30 comment letters to the bureau, NMFS and the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries unloaded



Fishermen Jim and Russ Lovgren explain to federal regulators how proposed wind turbines in New York affect the industry.

a host of concerns and calls for more investigation on the energy agency's plans and its potential effects on fisheries and ocean ecosystems.

Other factors are in play. The ongoing survival crisis of the endangered northern right whale is much on the minds of staff at the bureau and other agencies. Shipping and tugboat operators are preparing. At the State University of New York Maritime College in Throgs Neck, N.Y., a bridge simulator used to train tug captains now has a program showing what they can expect when pushing a petroleum barge past the Statoil array.

The Coast Guard is looking hard at the safety implications of funneling shipping past wind farms.

KIRK MOORE

"If we have one accident, one spill, that potentially could have generation-al impact," said Chris Scraba, deputy waterways chief for the Coast Guard Fifth District in Portsmouth, Va., at a meeting of the bureau's interagency task force for New York Bight renewable energy in Newark, N.J., on May 9.

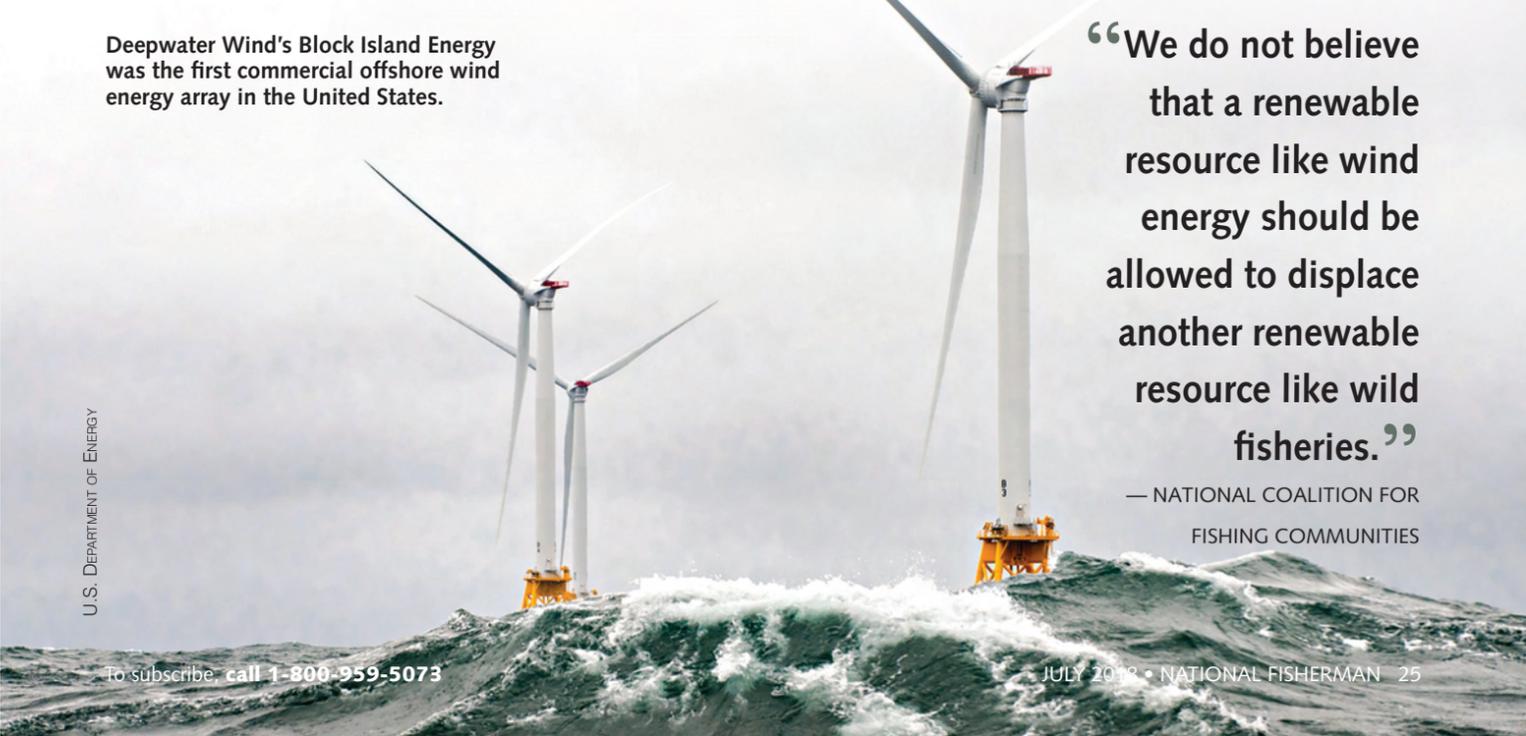
"At the end of the day, we do not have room for one accident, or one spill, in the New York Bight," Scraba emphasized.

Federal policy on offshore wind power has been consistent since 2010. The 2016 election campaign cast some political doubt, as then-candidate Trump criticized wind power. But it is back on track, especially on the shallow Atlantic shelf, where Bennett says there are three critical ingredients: dependable wind, shallow water for construction, and power-hungry energy markets in Mid-Atlantic and Northeast urban centers.

There are also obvious conflicts, like some of the richest fishing grounds available in the Northeast. In the bureau's recent "call area" for information about possibly leasing more of the New York Bight beyond the Statoil Empire Wind lease, the agency's own information search showed much of the area produces some \$68 million worth of commercial fishing landings, about 44 percent of the region total, most of the value in scallops, said Brian Hooker, a bureau analyst.

Deepwater Wind's Block Island Energy was the first commercial offshore wind energy array in the United States.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY



"We do not believe that a renewable resource like wind energy should be allowed to displace another renewable resource like wild fisheries."

— NATIONAL COALITION FOR FISHING COMMUNITIES

Bennett said not all of that area would be developed. Meeting New York state's goal of 2.4 gigawatts of off-shore power could be accomplished on 15 percent to 20 percent, he said.

In the fisheries picture, "sea scallops kind of blow everything away because they are so high-value," explained Julia Livermore, principal marine biologist with the Rhode Island Division of Marine Fisheries. When Rhode Island fishermen reached out over worries about how fisheries data is being used for offshore wind, Livermore undertook a project to synthesize vessel monitoring system reports from NMFS, fishermen's trip reports and dealer reports to get a better idea of what is caught in the bureau's call areas.

"We're hoping to expand this coast-wide," said Livermore. But that will take some work; Livermore said her initial investigation came up with 37 million data points that took weeks to run through the computer.

The bureau is using data sources like the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal, a collaboration of the states in that region that allows users to build chart overlays showing the ocean ecosystem and economy. That helps the energy agency build year-over-year images of how fishing effort is concentrated, such



Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke speaks at an offshore wind energy conference.

"You've got to go back 20 or 30 years" to see how patterns evolve, she told the task force. "Most of us are not scallopers. It's a mixed-trawl, midwater fleet... We don't want to be windmill jockeys. We want to provide food for the nation."

Looking at one overlay set on a wind lease near Rhode Island and Massachusetts, Brady said: "This will take out the mixed-trawl fleet of southern New England. Poof. Gone."

The extensive cabling that would link turbines is an issue to the surf clam and ocean quahog fleet, which is pre-

clam dredges, said Peter Himchak of LaMonica Fine Foods, a Cape May, N.J., clam processor.

Without that, Himchak said, "you're essentially creating a marine protected area — a clam sanctuary. They will not be able to fish in there."

Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke acknowledges that low oil prices and bipartisan opposition from state governments hobbled President Trump's ambition to get more offshore drilling.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy showed how the states have that leverage when he signed a measure in April effectively to ban offshore oil and gas support activities in his state. But on offshore wind energy, Democratic governors like Murphy and the Republican Trump administration appear to be aligning.

"As we look to the future, wind energy — particularly offshore wind — will play a greater role in sustaining American energy dominance," Zinke wrote in an April 16 opinion column for the *Boston Globe*. "Offshore wind uniquely leverages the natural resources off of our East Coast, bringing jobs and meeting the region's demand for renewable energy."

"While we continue our commitment to the coal miners and other energy workers who built our nation, we also support wind as a valued component of a diverse and flexible energy policy," Zinke added.

East Coast commercial fishermen called on Massachusetts Gov. Charles D. Baker Jr. to take a slower approach on wind development, limiting the first development off Martha's Vineyard to no more than 400 megawatts while studying the effects of building turbines on the ocean environment and fisheries.

"We are pragmatic, and we understand that we do not 'own' the ocean where these wind farms are being sited," said the National Coalition for Fishing Communities in a detailed proposal for a new relationship with the wind industry.

"But we do not believe that a renewable resource like wind energy should be allowed to displace another renewable resource like wild fisheries. To guard against that outcome, a mea-



DEEPWATER WIND

Deepwater Wind's Block Island array.

sured, restrained approach to the initial project size is best."

Fishermen's concerns were heard in New Jersey, where Murphy sent a letter to Zinke asking for a six-month extension of the public comment period beyond May 28. The wind and fishing industries can "coexist productively," Murphy wrote, but more time is needed to plan for potential conflicts.

Fishermen generally oppose the

"We don't want to be windmill jockeys. We want to provide food for the nation. This will take out the mixed-trawl fleet of southern New England. Poof."

— Bonnie Brady,

LONG ISLAND COMMERCIAL FISHING ASSOCIATION

Trump administration's move to broaden oil and gas exploration in their waters. On the Pacific coast, there is a different attitude toward wind power — only if it can be done right, fishing advocates say.

"With an oil spill, you have massive damage that goes on for years. You don't get wind spills," said Glen Spain, Northwest regional director for the Pa-

cific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations and the Institute for Fisheries Resources. "In general, we are utterly opposed to oil drilling on the West Coast. A spill anywhere would be a disaster."

That goes back to the 1969 spill off Santa Barbara, Calif., when a Union Oil well blew out and leaked an estimated 3 million gallons. That would be eclipsed 20 years later by the Exxon Valdez tanker grounding and spilling 11 million gallons in Alaska's Prince William Sound. Both were dwarfed in 2010 by the Gulf of Mexico Deepwater Horizon spill of an estimated 210 million gallons.

Fifty years later, "you still find tar balls on the beach in Santa Barbara. No one really knows what all the environmental effects have been," said Spain.

Fewer than two dozen oil platforms still stand off California, but companies are still interested in leasing, said Noah Oppenheim, the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations executive director. One cost disincentive for oil companies is California's very strict environmental regulations for decommissioning old platforms, a policy fishermen have pushed to protect, he said.

With wind power, "we're starting to see a great deal of activity," Oppenheim said. "Here the name of the game is floating wind."

Designed for deeper waters, turbines on floating towers are already being tested in the Pacific Northwest and in Europe, where Statoil's Hywind project off Scotland would be the first commercial floating array. For fishermen, one issue will be the turbine footprints,

with submerged anchor cables extending from the towers.

"It's more a matter of ocean zoning than anything else," to head off conflicts between the wind energy and fishing industries, he said. "There are ways of doing that."

Those considerations must include fish habitat, along with issues of restricting fishing activity and vessel movements with the placement of turbines, a matter of "making sure these projects make sense for coastal communities," said Spain.

But on the West Coast, there is also strong sentiment that moving away from fossil fuels will benefit the environment and fisheries now facing threats from ocean acidification related to climate change, he added.

Facing the wind energy rush, some fishermen in New England and the Mid-Atlantic are starting to talk about buyouts as part of the mitigation wind developers have to pay.

"It needs to be paid for by the windmill companies. Boats, permits, crews," said Jim Lovgren, who is throwing out \$300 million to \$500 million as a starting point for that argument.

Economic values have to be established for the individual fisheries that will be affected, from fixed to mobile gear, and the fishing industry must be deeply involved to help displaced fishermen, said New Jersey captain Brick Wenzel.

"Every one of these lease blocks is going to affect someone," he said. "Some kinds of gear will be able to work around these facilities."

In his *Boston Globe* commentary, Zinke acknowledged the 400-year-old American seafood industry is raising "well-founded" concerns. But he also cast offshore wind in heroic terms as a major new industry.

"Just like the pioneers who drilled our nation's first offshore wells in the 1890s," Zinke wrote, "those men and women who construct wind turbines in American waters in the years to come will continue to set our nation toward clean energy dominance." NF

Kirk Moore is the associate editor for *WorkBoat* magazine.



BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT

as annual fluctuations in the midwater-trawl squid fishery.

Still, the catch and fishing effort data that the bureau uses is very weak, said Bonnie Brady, executive director of the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association.

sented its own recommendations to the bureau.

Clammers could work in turbine arrays if towers are spaced 12,000 feet apart and cables plowed 2 meters (about 6.5 feet) below the sea floor so they are less likely to get snagged by hydraulic