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Calif. needs offshore wind road map, industry tells leaders

A spinning turbine from Dominion Energy Inc.'s pilot offshore wind project off the coast of Virginia Beach, Va. Francis Chung/POLITICO



Expanding ports so they can support offshore wind construction and ensuring power generated offshore can get to the grid are a couple of steps the state government needs to work on, industry advocates said this week.

BY **HEATHER RICHARDS**

GREENWIRE | California needs to make port investments and create an offshore wind "road map" for permitting projects as necessary next steps to raise floating turbines in the Pacific Ocean, industry leaders said during a symposium this week attended by state lawmakers and several senior officials of the Biden administration.

California could be a global hub for the fledgling floating wind sector, said Adam Stern, executive director of Offshore Wind California.

"To make it a reality, we need to move forward on essential next steps. That means investing in our transmission and port infrastructure, procuring at scale, setting a clear permitting road map," he said at the Pacific Offshore Wind Summit.

Last year, California committed to lifting 25 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2045, the biggest state target for offshore wind power in the country.

That was followed by the Biden administration holding its first offshore wind lease auction in the Pacific this winter and launching a Department of Energy initiative to drive down the cost of floating wind — a still developing technology that will allow wind arrays in deep waters like the Pacific Ocean — by 70 percent by 2035.

Offshore wind is central to the Biden administration's climate and decarbonization agenda, as it is in California.

But to get there, California's fledgling offshore wind industry needs ports capable of supporting offshore wind farm construction, a workforce to build and service floating turbines at sea, and potentially a state-led process to give the industry certainty it will be able get that wind electricity into the state's grid, industry officials told policymakers.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, launched the state's offshore wind planning into overdrive by raising ambitious offshore wind goals, but unlike Atlantic coastal states like New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts, California hasn't gone so far as to build a program guaranteeing set amounts of offshore wind power is purchased by state power deliverers.

State lawmakers at the symposium signaled that they hear the industry's call for more planning and preparation to drive certainty amid a larger push to get California to carbon-free electricity and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

"Our response to climate change demands a revolutionary approach like the Marshall Plan," said state Sen. John Laird (D). "California is on track — but now we have to implement these goals. Offshore wind is an essential part of the implementation plan — and a quintessential element of California's climate change revolution."

Port investment has already begun to move forward for California wind. The California Energy Commission approved more than \$10 million to ready the Northern California port of Humboldt for offshore wind. The Port of Long Beach just this week proposed a \$4.7 billion plan to build a massive facility for manufacturing and assembling offshore wind turbines.

The five companies that bought federal offshore wind leases late last year could produce nearly 5 gigawatts of offshore wind energy on those leases. California waters could support up to 200 GW of offshore wind, according to the Department of Energy.

The Biden administration set a floating offshore wind goal of 15 GW by 2035 — with an eye on development off both California and in the Gulf of Maine, where deep waters also require floating turbines. It's also advancing a study about incorporating offshore wind power into the Western grid, part of a \$100 earmark for offshore wind transmission research in the Inflation Reduction Act.

Biden administration officials this week promised a “laser-focused” effort to lift California's offshore wind industry.

Interior Deputy Secretary Tommy Beaudreau said the industry will deliver jobs, domestic manufacturing and climate benefits along with shoring up the nation's energy security through “reliable” energy.

“Industry has an indispensable role,” he said. “We'll be there every step of the way with you.”

But the California symposium also highlighted the conflict with Native American leaders over raising offshore wind turbines in the Pacific.

“The viewshed that our cultural practitioners still look at to this day, is the last one we have,” said Frankie Myers, vice chair of the Yurok Tribe. “Once again this country is asking for our tribal people to give up our sacred site for progress.”