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‘Going bigger is better’: California Energy Commission OKs 25 GW of offshore wind by 2045

The California Energy Commission approved offshore wind development goals of 2 to 5 GW by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045, spelling good news for Humboldt County, which is positioning itself to become a hub for the offshore wind industry. (Tobias Schwarz/AFP/Getty Images)



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California is signaling that the state is invested in offshore wind development and that spells good news for Humboldt County, which has some of the best offshore wind resources in the world.

On Wednesday, the California Energy Commission officially approved offshore wind development planning goals of up to 5 gigawatts by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045. Larry Oetker, executive director of the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District, told the Times-Standard that the district applauds the governor and the commission’s leadership on this.

“This is great news for Humboldt Bay and California,” Oetker said.

In June, the commission set initial planning goals of developing 3 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030, 10 to 15 GW by 2045 and 20 GW by 2050. A few weeks ago, Gov. Gavin Newsom called on the commission to establish a goal of at least 20 GW of development by 2045 as part of a larger package of actions intended to move faster on climate goals.

Adam Stern, executive director of trade group Offshore Wind California, said in a statement that the decision to set these ambitious planning goals gives confidence to the industry that it can invest in the state.

“These goals set an ambitious course and show that California is very serious about ‘going big’ on floating offshore wind, to drive economies of scale and generate the very substantial clean power, climate, and jobs benefits this renewable energy resource can deliver for our state,” Stern said. “Achieving 5 GW of offshore wind by 2030 will position the state to meet and even exceed its 25 GW goal by 2045. For California and offshore wind, going bigger is better.”

Ultimately, that means the Humboldt wind energy area 20 miles off the coast of Eureka could be partially built out by the end of this decade. Alongside the attention to developing offshore wind in federal waters, Oetker said the commission’s focus on port facilities and transmission infrastructure has also been key.

“They all work together,” he said.

The past year, the commission approved \$10.5 million for the harbor district to prepare for the offshore wind industry and those planning efforts are on track, Oetker said, with hopes to see a new terminal under construction in the next couple of years.

The biggest hurdle to developing offshore wind on the North Coast is the area’s transmission infrastructure, which primarily serves the local area with limited connectivity to the large state grid. The state is expected to do some upgrades to the existing transmission lines, but Oetker said it’s really setting its sights on developing a subsea transmission cable connecting to the Bay Area.

If passed, the Inflation Reduction Act could also lead to some exciting projects in Humboldt County in terms of large-scale battery storage and alternative energy storage facilities to help with transmission, Oetker said.

“What this means for us is that we will have good, stable, reliable power and make our region more resilient from wildfires and other natural hazards,” Oetker said.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is expected to auction leases in the Humboldt and Morro Bay wind energy areas this fall.