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BOEM Report Clears Way for 1st Calif. OSW Auctions

BOEM issued a finding of no significant impacts for the Morro Bay offshore wind lease area of California's Central Coast. | © RTO Insider LLC



By **Robert Mullin**

A new finding by the U.S. Bureau of Energy Management (BOEM) means California could see its first offshore wind lease auctions by the end of the year.

The agency on Wednesday *issued* a finding of no significant impacts (FONSI) on marine and human environments from “offshore wind energy leasing activities” in the Morro Bay Wind Energy Area (WEA), located roughly 20 miles off the coast of San Luis Obispo County, about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

BOEM’s environmental assessment (EA) of the WEA covers only the potential impact of the initial site “characterization” and “assessment” activities performed by offshore developers that are awarded leases for the three parcels within the area. Such activities could include surveys and extraction of core samples or the placement of meteorological buoys, the agency noted. The EA applies to the three parcels; associated rights of way, rights of use and easements; and the issuance of grants for subsea cable corridors and associated collector/converter platforms.

“The completion of our environmental review is an important step forward to advance clean energy development in a responsible manner while promoting economic vitality and well paying union jobs in Central California,” BOEM Director Amanda Lefton said in a statement. “We will continue to work closely with tribes, state and federal partners, and key stakeholders to ensure any future development avoids or minimizes potential impacts to the ocean and other ocean users in the region.”

But the agency pointed out that the FONSI does not apply to “the siting, construction and operation of any commercial wind power facilities,” which would be subject to a different process.

“If BOEM decides to conduct a lease sale in the Morro Bay WEA, the bureau will develop an environmental impact statement (EIS) before approving the construction of any offshore wind energy facility in the Morro Bay WEA,” the agency said in a press release. “That EIS will analyze the specific environmental consequences associated with the project, in consultation with tribes; appropriate federal, state and local agencies; and stakeholders and the public.”

The agency’s finding on Wednesday means that auctions for the three designated lease parcels within the Morro Bay WEA could proceed by the end of this year, in line with a schedule that BOEM offered in May when it announced a proposed sale notice for five lease areas off California, including two parcels in the Humboldt Bay WEA. (See [BOEM Issues Proposed Sale Notice for Calif. Offshore Wind Areas.](#))

The Morro Bay WEA covers 376 square miles and is expected to accommodate up to 3 GW of wind resources.