

RECHARGE

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US' largest floating wind project backed by RWE off Maine advances with federal review

Maine sailboats. Photo: Luiz Eduardo/Flickr



Consortium on target to develop nation's first installed array as a pilot for eventual giga-scale development in Gulf of Maine

By **Tim Ferry**

The US' largest floating wind project, the 144MW New England Aqua Ventus (NEAV) under development off coastal Maine, sailed ahead with availability of its federal draft environmental assessment (EA) for a research lease.

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), regulator of energy development in US waters, will publish the EA in the *Federal Register*, the nation's journal of record on 21 July, initiating a 30-day comment period.

The EA is a preliminary evaluation of potential development impact, and its approval would greenlight the lease sale, not the actual project.

"BOEM is committed to maintaining open and transparent communication and values this opportunity for public input to help inform any future decisions," said BOEM director Elizabeth Klein. "We look forward to hearing from our Tribal and government partners, as well as all stakeholders and ocean users, as we move forward with this process."

The state is helping lead development of the project located some 23 miles (37 km) southeast of Portland with technology partner University of Maine (UMaine) and commercial associates RWE and Mitsubishi-owned Diamond Offshore.

It forms the "cornerstone of Maine's judicious approach to floating offshore wind," said Dan Burgess, director of governor Janet Mills' Energy Office.

Maine is developing NEAV as a pilot programme to gauge local impacts and stakeholder response, in contrast to its New England neighbours that are rapidly pushing largescale commercial development that has stirred **opposition by environmentalists and fisheries alike**.

The state applied for the 9,637-acre (39km²) research lease in 2021, with the process moving forward in January when **BOEM found no competing interest** in the site.

NEAV will deploy **VoltturnUS concrete floating platforms** developed by UMaine that are based on bridgebuilding technology and can be readily produced from local materials.

NEAV's steady progress through the permitting regime may enable it to be the nation's "first floating array" by 2029, Habib Dagher, executive director of the University of Maine (UMaine)'s Advanced Structures & Composites Center, previously told *Recharge*.

While California has taken the lead in commercial floating wind in the US, setting goals of up-to 3GW by 2030 and 25GW by 2045, most analysts don't expect to see operating capacity there until post-2030.

Maine has not set an offshore wind target but considers the sector critical to reducing emissions. The state is directing research into construction of a **floating wind port at Searsport**, some 110-miles north of Portland, to take advantage of what might be a sector boom in the Gulf of Maine.

Last April **BOEM established a 9.8 million-acre (39,677 km²) "call area"** for commercial interest in the Gulf's windy, deepwater sweeps holding nearly 120GW of potential capacity.

This will likely be winnowed down dramatically as was recently seen in the Gulf of Mexico. The industry is expected to see strong demand from southern New England and the Mid-Atlantic as states struggle to reach emissions targets.

BOEM anticipates selling leases in the Gulf of Maine by 2025.