Interior secretary sees Maine wind energy center

GLENN ADAMS - Assciated Press - Associated Press

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar vowed Thursday to move swiftly to identify offshore energy zones after touring a university center that's developing deep-water wind generation technology and intends to deploy its first offshore wind-power prototype next year.

Salazar toured the University of Maine's Advanced Structures and Composites Center to learn more about testing, deployment, fabrication and environmental monitoring of the off-shore wind turbines.

Afterward, Salazar reiterated that Interior Department will work to expedite federal leases for ocean sites for deep-water energy projects. He also praised the work being done at the University of Maine.

"It is important that the world knows what's happening here in Maine," Salazar said. "Maine isn't playing around, and Maine isn't playing around for second place."

UMaine leads the DeepCWind Consortium, which also includes, nonprofits, utilities, businesses involved in offshore and marine design and construction, and firms with expertise in wind project siting. Their goal is to generate 5 gigawatts of power by 2030, employing floating turbines located 20-50 miles offshore.

A one-third scale turbine is scheduled for deployment next July off Monhegan Island. Full-size turbines will be as tall as the Washington Monument.

Salazar, dressed in jeans, boots and a baseball cap, was joined by the composite center's director, Professor Habib Dagher; the director of Maine's Office of Energy Independence, Ken Fletcher; and U.S. Sen. Susan Collins.

Collins said Salazar was impressed. "We are the real deal. We're ahead of everyone else," she said. "We're doing it."

Salazar first promised last year to spur offshore wind projects in the Atlantic Ocean by expediting permits and identifying promising areas for wind power. He vowed to create a process that could result in leases issued within two years, instead of seven years or more.

The secretary made his pitch shortly after a report by the National Wildlife Federation and co-sponsored by three dozen other organizations said America has a largely untapped potential for offshore wind power. It called for a more aggressive approach for wind power development off the Atlantic coast.

Salazar had a full agenda Thursday in the state that bills itself Vacationland, with additional stops in the shopping mecca of Freeport and in Millinocket in the heart of

the state's north woods.

At outdoor-goods giant L.L. Bean's flagship store in Freeport, Salazar and Collins were to hear about successful public-private partnerships that drive outdoor recreation and encourage youth activities outdoors.

Salazar also traveled to Millinocket to hear from community members and stakeholders about the potential creation of a new North Woods National Park east of Baxter State Park and adjacent to East Branch of the Penobscot River.

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