Feds discuss Maine offshore wind proposal

The Associated Press

SOUTH PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The waters off the Maine coast are being eyed as a potential site for the nation's first deep-water wind farm.

An intergovernmental task force formed by the federal Bureau of Energy Management met Thursday to discuss an application by a Norwegian energy company to erect a four-turbine wind farm on a test site about 12 miles off Boothbay Harbor.

If the project is approval and developed, it could be operating in 2016. It would mark a milestone in the development of offshore wind power, much the say the Model T marked a turning point in car manufacturing, said Paul Williamson, executive director of the Maine Wind Industry Initiative.

"Thirty years from now people could point to Maine and say this is where it all happened," Williamson said.

More than 30 members of the task force, along with members of the public, crowded into a hotel conference room in South Portland for Thursday's meeting.

The meeting was scheduled after the Norway-based Statoil North America Inc. filed an application for the project, called Hywind Maine, with the federal agency in October.

Company spokesman Ola Morten Aanestad told Maine Public Broadcasting Network that Maine is one of two places — the other is off the coast of Scotland — under consideration for a pilot-scale floating wind farm.

If Maine is the chosen site, it should be up and running by the summer of 2016, Aanestad said. If the project goes well, the long-term goal would be to develop a large-scale commercial wind farm generating enough power to serve the needs of about 300,000 homes.

Statoil's application fits in well with the state's vision of developing an offshore energy industry.

Supporters say a vibrant offshore wind power industry would lead to billions of dollars in investment for the state and industries to manufacture, install and service wind turbines.

But others have concerns that wind turbines could interfere with and take fishing grounds away from fishermen.

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