Mass., RI wind area review to aid new projects

SHANNON YOUNG - Associated Press - Associated Press

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar says a major wind energy initiative on the Outer Continental Shelf offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts has finished environmental assessments that will help place the U.S. at the forefront of the "renewable energy revolution."

Salazar announced the completion of the landmark assessment of the Rhode Island/Massachusetts Wind Energy Area on Monday afternoon. The area is comprised of more than 164,000 acres of mutual interest for the two states.

The assessment will help the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management in future leasing decisions under the Obama administration's offshore wind energy initiative. Bureau director Tommy Beaudreau said the assessment will help identify the best location for commercial wind energy activities offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts. He said the bureau is working hard to offer competitive lease sales by the end of 2012.

"It is important that we develop our coastal resources in a thoughtful and inclusive manner as we strive to make Rhode Island a national leader in offshore wind development, and help bring assembly and manufacturing jobs to the state," U.S. Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., said in a statement.

Reed, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment, has worked to ensure future offshore wind turbines have minimal environmental impact, while harnessing maximum energy potential.

Following the announcement of the environmental assessment, stakeholders in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, including representatives from the fishing industry, cultural organizations and tribes, will have 30 days to make a public comment on the findings.

The bureau will host public informational sessions on July 16 and 17 to engage stakeholders and consider public comments on the environmental assessment. The sessions will help the bureau determine if it should conduct further analyses in order to hold a lease sale for commercial offshore wind development.

Beaudreau said the assessment "sets the stage for moving forward aggressively with competitive lease sales in this area."

Eight companies have already expressed interest in leases offshore Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Salazar told reporters via a conference call Monday.

The department also announced similar progress for a proposed wind power complex in Wyoming that would generate enough energy to power 1 million homes and be the largest wind farm in the United States.

"Today, as we take the next steps toward realizing what could be the largest wind energy project in the world and holding a competitive offshore wind lease sale, we are really at the forefront of a renewable energy revolution," Salazar said in a statement.

In 2010, the secretary launched the wind energy initiative for the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf to facilitate siting, leasing and project construction. According to the department, a "critical piece" of the policy includes determining wind energy areas in conjunction with Bureau of Ocean Energy Management task forces and other federal agencies. The environmental assessment was developed to simplify the leasing process.

The secretary commended the progress made in renewable energy over the past few years, adding that now the United States is emerging as a leader in the field, harnessing 21 percent of the global wind capacity.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/11/2013 - 4:02pm*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2012/07/mass-ri-wind-area-review-aid-new-projects