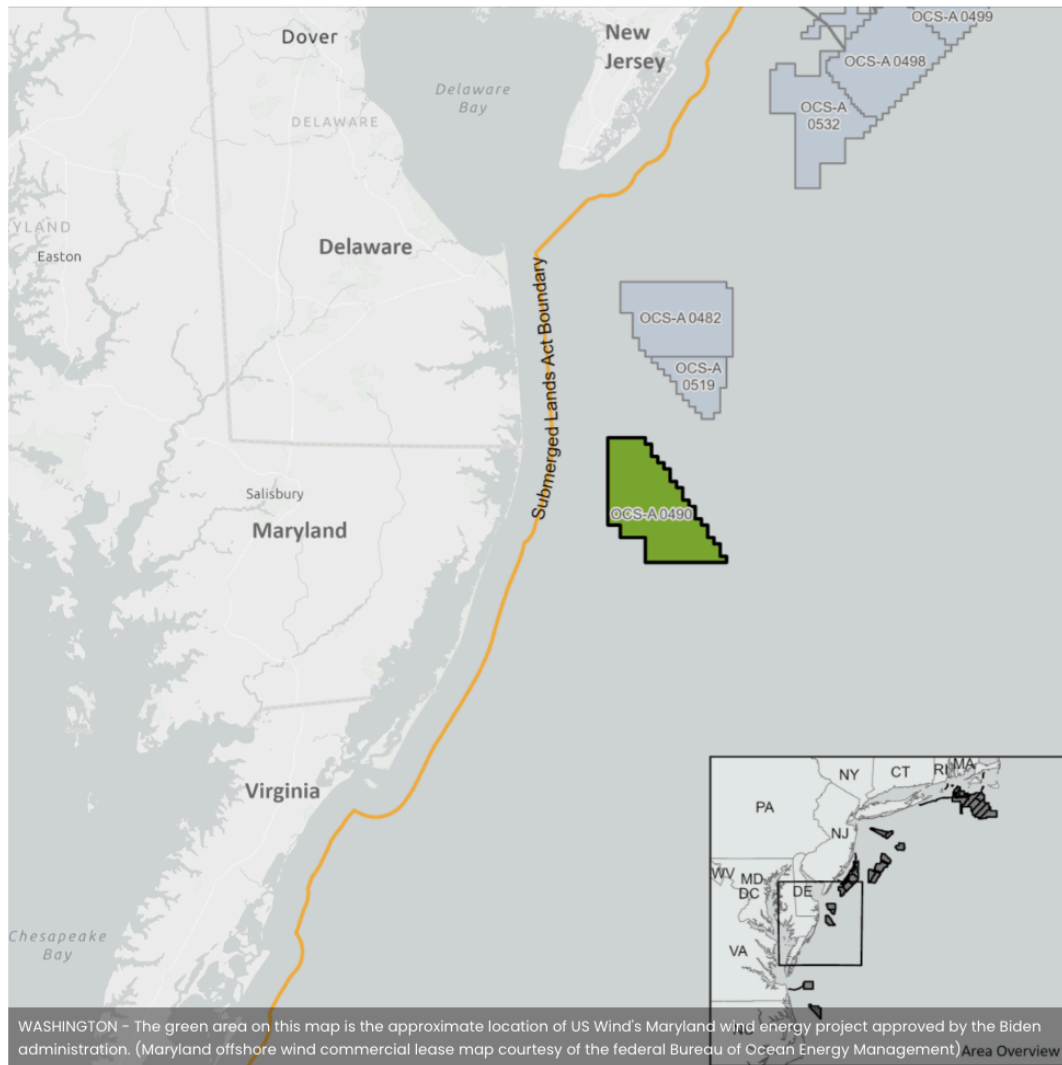


MARYLAND

White House OKs Maryland wind energy project to be built about 10 miles off Ocean City



BY KATHARINE WILSON - SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

WASHINGTON – Offshore wind energy is coming to Maryland, and with it, union jobs.

The Biden administration on Thursday approved Baltimore-based US Wind's project to build offshore wind turbines about 10 miles off the coast of Ocean City, Maryland.

The offshore wind farm could generate over two gigawatts of wind energy and power over 718,000 homes, according to the Department of the Interior.

President Joe Biden said in a statement that the wind energy industry had been “struggling to gain a foothold” in the years before he came into office.

“From manufacturing and shipbuilding to port operations and construction, this industry will support tens of thousands of good-paying and union jobs, provide reliable clean power to homes and businesses, strengthen our power grid against outages, and help reduce pollution – all while protecting biodiversity and marine ecosystems,” the president said.

Maryland Energy Administration Director Paul Pinsky called the Biden administration’s action “an important step forward in the effort to bring clean, renewable energy production to Maryland’s coast.”

“Today’s announcement underscores the careful, comprehensive and collaborative environmental analysis that has gone into these projects,” Pinsky said in a statement.

The Maryland project is the tenth commercial-scale offshore wind energy project approved by the Biden administration. Combined, the projects are projected to generate 15 gigawatts of clean energy, half of Biden’s goal of 30 gigawatts of offshore wind-produced energy by 2030.

The Maryland project includes up to 114 wind turbines, four offshore substation platforms and a meteorological tower. There will be three phases to the US Wind project, two of which – called MarWin and Momentum Wind – have already received offshore renewable energy certificates from the state.

Energy is set to start flowing in December 2028 from the first phase of the project. The final project is expected to be completed in late 2027 or early 2028, according to the plan submitted by US Wind.

The approval is a win for Maryland environmental groups and the state government, which have been working for offshore wind power in the state for around 10 years.

The Maryland legislature passed a series of bills, starting in 2013, to set offshore wind energy projects in motion.

The state set a goal in 2023, through the Promoting Offshore Wind Energy Resources Act, to generate 8.5 gigawatts of power from offshore wind by 2031.

This goal has hit some road bumps along the way, including the withdrawal of Denmark-based Ørsted’s planned offshore wind projects in January.

US Wind won the competitive lease sale of the 46,970 acres of federal ocean waters in 2014.

“By moving away from reliance on dirty fossil fuel energy and building renewable energy, Marylanders will be able to breathe cleaner air and benefit from new clean energy jobs,” Maryland Sierra Club Chapter Director Josh Tulkin said in a statement Thursday.

Jamie DeMarco, the federal campaigns coordinator for the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, said in an interview with Capital News Service that the Maryland wind farm is a milestone in moving offshore energy generation forward in Maryland.

“This is a huge undertaking to build an entire machine to deploy offshore wind, but once that machine is built, it’ll be able to hum and crank out new domestic energy, and clean energy that’s going to help us clean the air and meet our climate goals,” DeMarco said.

Offshore wind turbines have been coming online across the East Coast, DeMarco said, but this will be the first operational offshore wind facility in Maryland.

Environmental advocates aren’t the only celebrating parties. Union officials are touting the jobs set to be created by the wind farm.

Almost 2,680 jobs annually over seven years could be created during the development and construction phase of the wind farm, according to the Interior Department.

US Wind’s planned permanent offshore wind components production facility, called Sparrows Point Steel in Sparrows Point, Baltimore – the former home of Bethlehem Steel – is forecast to generate jobs for steelworkers.

The Baltimore Bethlehem Steel mill, which closed in 2012, was once the largest steel producer in the world. Sparrows Point Steel will bring steel worker jobs back to Maryland, DeMarco said, in a way that hasn’t been seen since the closure of Bethlehem.

Jim Strong, the offshore wind sector assistant for the United Steelworkers International Union, told CNS Thursday that the facility is expected to bring in over 500 jobs. The project will help not only steelworkers, Strong said, but other union trades as well.

“It’s about addressing our climate crisis, about creating new green energy jobs – these will be high paid union jobs,” Strong said.

Strong has served as a liaison between the union and US Wind. He said that the Sparrows Point facility has the opportunity to become a “central hub” for monopile production on the Atlantic Ocean. Monopiles, steel cylinders, are used for wind turbines, bridges and other projects, he said.

The project has some detractors, like Rep. Andy Harris, R-Maryland, who represents the Eastern Shore.

“Offshore wind industrialization comes at a heavy cost to our marine life and environment, and is an incredibly expensive way to generate electricity,” Rep. Harris said on X in July. “We should never allow foreign owned companies to control our energy supply—much less harm our environment while doing it.”

US Wind is a subsidiary of Italian company Renexia SpA.

The federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management’s director, Elizabeth Klein, said in a statement that the Maryland project “reflects the best available science and invaluable insights from Tribes, government agencies, local communities, industry leaders, ocean users, and environmental groups gathered during our extensive environmental review process.”

“As we continue to support the undeniable momentum we see along our coasts, our focus remains on fostering responsible energy development, while protecting marine life and ecosystems,” she said.

Democrats in the state, including Gov. Wes Moore, have been supportive of the project. Moore signed a memorandum of understanding with the federal government in June supporting offshore wind production.