

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 17, 2022

Director Amanda Lefton
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Lefton,

As members of the Congressional delegations of Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, we write in support of funding for critical baseline research and scientific studies to advance sustainable offshore wind opportunities in the Gulf of Maine. The recent announcement from Interior Secretary Deb Haaland outlining BOEM's plans to pursue offshore wind leases in the Gulf of Maine by mid-2024 brings new urgency to commence key research studies that will ensure offshore wind development in this area is underpinned by robust scientific research.

Our states have enormous potential to produce significant renewable energy as well as anchor a burgeoning industry and workforce through the responsible development of offshore wind. While our state governments are already engaging with leaders of our region's fishing industries and other ocean users to lessen conflicts with existing users and marine life, it is still crucial that BOEM complete further stakeholder outreach and scientific research to inform the agency's planning process before conducting lease sales.

In BOEM's National Studies List for 2022, the Office of Renewable Energy Programs identified two studies that would provide essential information and enhance BOEM's capacity to assess, predict, monitor, and manage the potential environmental impacts of offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine prior to inform the agency's planning process. The two studies include an Ecological Baseline Study of the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf Off Maine (AT-22-12), and a Comprehensive Assessment of Existing Gulf of Maine Ecosystem Data and Identification of Data Gaps to Inform Future Research (AT-22-11).

We urge BOEM to invest in the Gulf of Maine as funding decisions are made for the fiscal year by prioritizing these two studies, in particular the Ecological Baseline Study (AT-22-12). As part of this study, BOEM should consider using targeted benthic habitat surveys collected via high resolution multibeam mapping and ground truthing of the data using sediment sampling and benthic fauna characterization to generate detailed habitat and sediment maps.

Existing bathymetric and benthic habitat data is extremely limited for the Gulf of Maine, yet it is fundamental to determine habitat use and distribution of species. This information is needed to determine areas of complex habitats, which are critically important for several important species including American lobster and Atlantic cod. This survey would also protect areas in the Gulf of Maine that have been designated as critical habitat for the endangered North Atlantic Right Whale and other species. We also encourage you to prioritize a comprehensive marine mammal

and wildlife surveys and the collection of fisheries data in coordination with NOAA and state marine resource agencies to inform our understanding of the potential impact of offshore wind development on regional fisheries and marine species.

Continuing engagement with regional stakeholders has identified gaps related to the socioeconomic and cumulative impact assessments of offshore wind development in the Gulf of Maine. Accordingly, we support regionally specific research to investigate the projected economic impacts of offshore wind development on existing ocean users, as well as its cumulative impacts on our natural resources, existing uses, industries, and people.

The State of Maine spent more than a year working directly with fishermen and other stakeholders to put forward a comprehensive application to BOEM for a research lease. This project would use an innovative floating wind turbine technology developed at the University of Maine, which was developed with funding from the Department of Energy. We strongly support this research array application and believe it would contribute valuable and complementary data to an Ecological Baseline Study and a comprehensive evaluation of existing ecosystem data in the Gulf of Maine. Together, the resulting information will help advance floating offshore wind in the U.S. and build on our collective understanding of how to best minimize impacts to the fishing industry and the environment.

BOEM's work to support regional outreach and comprehensive habitat and wildlife data collection and analyses using the best available science will be essential to advancing offshore wind in a way that is environmentally and economically responsible. We thank you for your attention to the Gulf of Maine and look forward to continuing to engage with you as you initiate these essential studies to aid in responsibly developing offshore wind.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress