

# Environmental Technical Working Group (E-TWG) Annual Bulletin

October 2024



We are pleased to share key highlights from the New York State Environmental Technical Working Group (E-TWG) in 2023-2024. In the past year, over 690 people were directly involved with E-TWG activities, with particularly broad engagement via the 2024 State of the Science. Many thanks to all who have contributed their time and expertise!

## About the E-TWG

The E-TWG is an independent advisory body to the State of New York with a regional focus on offshore wind and wildlife issues in the eastern U.S. This team of stakeholders includes 17 advisory member organizations, comprising offshore wind developers and science-based non-governmental organizations, as well as 19 observer member organizations representing state and federal agencies. The group provides advice on how to advance offshore wind development in an environmentally responsible way and promotes regional coordination and collaboration.

## 2024 State of the Science Workshop

The fourth [State of the Science Workshop](#) took place July 16-19, 2024 at Stony Brook University. The goals of the workshop were to 1) engage and inform stakeholders about the state of knowledge regarding wildlife, fisheries, and offshore wind energy development, including ongoing efforts to understand, minimize, and mitigate environmental impacts; 2) promote regional coordination by sharing updates on research studies, guidelines development, and other efforts in the U.S. and elsewhere; and 3) promote collaboration through expert information exchange and discussion.

The 2024 workshop, the first to include a fisheries as well as a wildlife focus, brought together more than 590 in-person and virtual participants. The workshop included 14 symposia sessions, 28 oral presentation and discussion sessions, and 57 poster presentations. Presentations focused on the overarching theme of the 2024 workshop, *Taking An Ecosystem Approach: Integrating Offshore Wind, Wildlife, and Fisheries*. Several side meetings and workshops were also held in conjunction with the main conference.

All workshop sessions were recorded and [are publicly available on the E-TWG website](#). Many thanks to our planning committee, speakers, and all who participated!

## E-TWG Activities

The [E-TWG met](#) twice in the last year, with discussions centered on prioritization of E-TWG efforts, the [New York State Offshore Wind Masterplan 2.0](#), compensatory mitigation and marine net gain, environmental mitigation plans for New York projects, and Specialist Committee efforts. The E-TWG was active at the committee level, with three specialist committees meeting regularly.

The E-TWG continues to work with the Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC) and other regional efforts. Areas of active coordination include identification of E-TWG priorities in relation to RWSC activities, furthering of E-TWG avian displacement guidance committee efforts via the formation of an RWSC working group, and featuring RWSC activities at the 2024 State of the Science Workshop.

## E-TWG Website

Between November 2023 and October 2024, over 7,800 visitors accessed the [E-TWG website](#) from across the globe, with a particular focus on the State of the Science Workshop page and Specialist Committee pages. The E-TWG also website hosts a [Webinar Library](#) of free, publicly available webinars related to offshore wind energy development and wildlife, to be used as resource for stakeholders. It was last updated in the fall of 2024. In addition, the [Mitigation Practices Database Tool](#) (formerly the Mitigation and Monitoring Practices Tool) has been redesigned into an RShiny tool for increased functionality.



## Avian Displacement Guidance Committee

A Specialist Committee was convened by the E-TWG and chaired by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to advance recommendations for the effective detection and characterization of changes in the distributions and habitat use of marine birds in relation to offshore wind development. These recommendations are intended to complement BOEM's existing avian survey [guidelines](#) for site characterization and to support environmental research in the U.S. Atlantic. However, they also have broad applicability to research efforts in all regions of offshore wind development.

The Committee was formed in May 2022 and concluded in August 2024, and developed two guidance documents: 1) [Guidance for Pre- and Post-Construction Monitoring to Detect Changes in Marine Bird Distributions and Habitat Use Related to Offshore Wind Development](#) and 2) [Recommendations for Evaluating the Use of Existing Baseline Observational Survey Data for Birds in Offshore Wind Site Characterization Processes for the U.S. Atlantic](#).

The Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative has started a Marine Bird Distribution Working Group to continue building on the committee's efforts. More information on the guidance documents, committee process, and membership is available [here](#).

The E-TWG is initiating communications efforts in late 2024 focused on birds and offshore wind energy development. If you are interested in participating in this specialist committee or serving as an expert reviewer of draft materials, please reach out to [mary.mcelroy@briwildlife.org](mailto:mary.mcelroy@briwildlife.org)

## Whale Communications Committee

The E-TWG formed a specialist committee in 2023 to develop communications materials to aid in the dissemination of accurate, readily understandable information around whale mortality events and the level of potential risk to whales from offshore wind energy development activities.

This committee is developing a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as a resource for stakeholders who are in direct communication with the general public and receive questions related to whales and offshore wind. The intent of this effort is to provide scientifically sound, accurate answers to address common questions. This FAQ resource is updated over time to address emerging questions related to whales and offshore wind energy development. The most recent version of the FAQ document can be found [here](#). This effort is scheduled to wrap up in 2025, but the E-TWG will continue to focus on effective communication related to wildlife and offshore wind development in future.

## Scientific Publications

*[A framework for studying the effects of offshore wind energy development on birds and bats in the Eastern United States](#)* was published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*. This publication arose from a 2020 workshop funded by NYSERDA (under the auspices of the E-TWG) to inform the development of a scientific research framework to guide the long-term study of potential impacts to birds and bats from offshore wind energy development in the eastern United States. This collaborative effort included input from a range of stakeholders, including scientists, environmental nonprofits, regulators, and offshore wind energy developers.

*[A synthetic analysis of post-construction displacement and attraction of marine birds at offshore wind energy installations](#)* was recently published in *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*. This meta-analysis grew out of the Avian Displacement Guidance Committee effort and highlights the importance of understanding the effects of offshore wind farms on marine bird distributions and habitat use to inform future research.

## Offshore Wind Master Plan 2.0: Deep Water

Under Governor Hochul's leadership, the [Offshore Wind Master Plan 2.0: Deep Water](#) was initiated in 2022 to provide the research and analysis necessary to better position the State to take advantage of opportunities afforded by deep water offshore wind, assess available and emerging technologies, and develop estimates of costs, benefits, and risks of floating offshore wind. Following initial environmental studies, which were shared with the E-TWG for feedback in September 2023, NYSERDA initiated an additional study to assess the potential impact of offshore wind development on oceanographic processes, which is still in progress.



## New York Offshore Wind Solicitation

In February 2024, Governor Hochul announced the results of New York's fourth offshore wind solicitation, with two offshore wind projects awarded - Empire Wind 1, a planned 810-megawatt project (developed by Equinor), and Sunrise Wind, a planned 924-megawatt project (developed by Ørsted and Eversource). NYSERDA announced finalized contracts for these projects in June 2024.

In July 2024, NYSERDA launched New York's fifth competitive offshore wind solicitation. This advances the State's progress to develop offshore wind energy in alignment with the State's [10-Point Action Plan](#) and the goals of the [Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act \(Climate Act\)](#). In September, NYSERDA received 25 proposals in response from four offshore wind developers representing 6,870 MW in total offer capacity.

## Offshore Wind Transmission Planning

New York State has taken several steps to plan for the transition to a zero-carbon electric system and in 2022 the Department of Public Service Commission recognized the benefits of creating a shared meshed offshore system to handle energy transmission from multiple offshore wind generating projects. In April 2024, NYSERDA published the [Meshed Offshore Wind Transmission Study](#) to evaluate costs and benefits of a New York state meshed network, including severable plausible scenarios and pathways to help support comparative evaluation between radial and meshed system configurations. In the fifth offshore wind solicitation, NYSERDA required proposals be designed with optional capability to interconnect with a meshed system.

## Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the New York Bight

In January 2024, BOEM [announced](#) the availability of its Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement ([Draft PEIS](#)) for potential development of six wind lease areas offshore New York and New Jersey in an area known as the New York Bight. Following a public comment period, BOEM published the New York Bight Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Final PEIS) on Oct. 25, 2024. The Final PEIS can be accessed [here](#).



# Regional Updates



## Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative

The [Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative \(RWSC\)](#)'s [Science Plan](#) was released in early 2024. The plan was collaboratively developed by the research community via taxa-based subcommittees, the RWSC Steering Committee, state and federal government agencies, offshore wind companies, and environmental nonprofits. The Science Plan describes data and research needs for the offshore wind stakeholder community and provides a framework for the RWSC Steering Committee when making decisions on what projects to fund.

The RWSC is working on a range of other efforts to support regional coordination and research. In August, the RWSC launched a [Research Planning Map](#) that displays the locations where wildlife and environment data are being collected to support offshore wind research. The RWSC is currently working to build an [Offshore Wind & Wildlife Data Catalog](#) to make related data easier to find and reuse.

## Federal and Commercial Activities

In March 2024, South Fork Wind, an array of 12 turbines located 35 miles east of Montauk, New York, became the first commercial-scale offshore wind project to be fully operational in U.S. federal waters. Several other projects, including Vineyard Wind 1 and Revolution Wind, are in the construction phase of development with project completion slated for 2025-2026.

In August 2024, BOEM held a [lease sale](#) in the Central Atlantic, selling leases to Equinor Wind US LLC and Virginia Electric and Power Co. For a combined \$92 million. In October, a second [wind energy lease sale](#) was held for the Gulf of Maine, the first commercial sale for floating offshore wind on the Atlantic Coast. Four lease areas were sold to Avangrid Renewables and Invenergy NE Offshore Wind for over \$21.9 million. Together, the leased areas have the potential to power more than 4.5 million homes with clean energy.

In the past year, BOEM announced approval of the Construction and Operations Plans for Sunrise Wind, New England Wind 1 and 2, and Atlantic Shores South. Other projects throughout the U.S. Atlantic are in various stages of development. For more information on the current status of various projects, see the [Northeast Ocean Data Portal](#).

In October 2024, BOEM launched the [POWERON](#) (Partnership for an Offshore Wind Regional Observation Network) program in coordination with NOAA Fisheries and the RWSC. This partnership will help ensure standardized collection, processing, and archiving of marine acoustic data for offshore wind lease areas. Offshore wind energy developers can make annual financial contributions to POWERON to fulfill their requirements for long-term passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) for marine mammals.

## Regional Fisheries Updates

NYSERDA continues to support the establishment of a fair, equitable, and transparent [regional fisheries compensatory mitigation fund](#) with support from the [Fisheries Technical Working Group](#).

On November 4, 2024, Brown Greer in partnership with the Carbon Trust were selected as the team to design and develop a regional fisheries mitigation program, which will provide fair and equitable financial compensation to the commercial and recreational for-hire fishing community from impacts from offshore wind on the East Coast. The team will establish robust and meaningful engagement opportunities for the commercial and recreational for-hire fishing industry, states, and developers. Additionally, Brown Greer and the Carbon Trust will work with the interim governance structure, the Design Oversight Committee and the For-Hire Committee, which will provide advice and guidance from the states, fishing industry, and offshore wind developers to the team as they develop processes, policies, and procedures for the program.