Environmental Technical Working Group (E-TWG)

Annual Bulletin

October 2023

We are pleased to share key highlights from the New York State Environmental Technical Working Group (E-TWG) in 2022-2023. In the past year, over 400 people were directly involved with E-TWG activities (see below). 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. The group includes 17 advisory member organizations, comprised of offshore wind developers and science-based non-governmental organizations, as well as 15 observer organizations from 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.

Scientific Publications

Authors from NYSERDA, Biodiversity Research Institute, and Tetra Tech (representing both the Environmental and Fisheries Technical Working Groups, or TWGs), published the journal article Effective Stakeholder Engagement for Offshore Wind Energy Development: The State of New York's Fisheries and Environmental Technical Working Groups in *Marine and Coastal Fisheries*. The article highlights the stakeholder engagement approach implemented by New York (via development of TWGs) as a means of informing responsible offshore wind energy development and includes lessons learned from the TWG process.

Additionally, a book chapter was published in 2023 that builds from findings from the 2020 State of the Science. Sound-Related Effects of Offshore Wind Energy on Fishes and Aquatic Invertebrates: Research Recommendations was published in *The Effects of Noise of Aquatic Life: Principles and Practical Considerations*. This chapter was authored by E-TWG scientific support staff and experts involved with the State of the Science Workgroup on fishes and aquatic invertebrates.

E-TWG Meetings

The E-TWG met twice in the last year, with discussions centered around specialist committee efforts (see below), the future role of the E-TWG relative to other regionally focused efforts, coordination among leaseholders in the New York Bight, and efforts to inform the development of New York State's Offshore Wind Master Plan 2.0. The E-TWG was also highly active at the committee level, with four specialist committees meeting regularly in 2023.

Membership

The E-TWG saw changes in representatives from several member organizations. Many thanks to outgoing members for their time spent on the E-TWG, and a warm welcome to new representatives!

E-TWG Website

Between October 2022 and October 2023, over 4,500 visitors accessed the E-TWG site from across the globe. In addition to creating a webpage for the 2024 State of the Science Workshop, a new webpage was also created to highlight existing fact-based resources on recent whale mortality events and the level of potential risk to whales from offshore wind energy development activities.

Webinar Library

The E-TWG website hosts a library of free, publicly available webinars related to offshore wind energy development and wildlife. Webinars are searchable and include a range of offshore wind and wildlife-focused topics. The library was updated twice in 2023.

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Synthesis of Regional Wildlife Research Recommendations

Final products from the E-TWG's Regional Synthesis Workgroup were publicly released in 2023 following stakeholder and E-TWG review. The workgroup included experts from 19 organizations, with additional support from the Offshore Wind Synthesis of Environmental Effects Research (SEER) team. To inform the allocation of funding for regional research and monitoring, the workgroup developed two products:

1. U.S. Atlantic Offshore Wind Environmental Research Recommendations Database. Released in January 2023, this database compiles and synthesizes data gaps and research needs to help researchers and funders easily access, sort, and prioritize topics relevant to the environmental effects of offshore wind energy development.
2. Responsible Practices for Regional Wildlife Monitoring and Research in Relation to Offshore Wind Development. Released in September 2023, this written guidance makes recommendations on study design and data transparency for regional research. It also defines terminology and identifies criteria for research prioritization.

These products may be used by states and other government entities, offshore wind developers, and others who are funding regional research and monitoring efforts. The committee products have also served as resources for the Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative in developing their Science Plan.

Developing Guidance for Pre- and Post-Construction Monitoring

In collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the E-TWG is supporting development of guidance for pre- and post-construction monitoring to detect changes in marine bird distributions and habitat use in relation to offshore wind development. An expert Specialist Committee, made up of individuals from 16 organizations, has been meeting monthly since 2021 to develop guidance that identifies key questions, appropriate methodologies, and study design and analytical recommendations. This effort is intended to:

- Encourage consistency in pre- and post-construction monitoring across projects and ensure generation of meaningful results,
- Improve efficiency and thus reduce costs of monitoring,
- Reduce duplicative efforts, and
- Facilitate regional analyses using site-specific data to address key information gaps.

The Committee is also developing guidance on when existing avian survey data for a lease area is sufficient for site characterization purposes. Broad input from stakeholders is being incorporated into the committee's efforts via a virtual workshop and public comment period in October-November 2023. The public release of both documents is anticipated by the end of 2023.

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Whales and Offshore Wind Communications

A specialist committee was initiated in 2023 to develop communications materials to aid in the dissemination of accurate, readily understandable information around recent whale mortality events and the level of potential risk to whales from offshore wind energy development activities. The committee includes 11 member organizations with relevant expertise and is also working with external experts. The initial end product will be a detailed FAQ document, which will be added to over time; the first FAQ responses will be available on the committee webpage in early 2024.

Mark Your Calendars for the 2024 State of the Science!

The 2024 State of the Science on Offshore Wind, Wildlife, and Fisheries will be help in Long Island, New York from July 16-19. For the first time, the Workshop is expanding to include fisheries and offshore wind topics, as well as topics relating to wildlife and the environment. The event will offer opportunities to share and discuss scientific research in all areas involving wildlife, fisheries, and offshore wind energy development. The 2024 theme is *Taking an Ecosystem Approach: Integrating Offshore Wind, Wildlife, and Fisheries*. The call for workshops, symposia, and individual abstracts (including both oral presentations and posters) is expected to open in late 2023.

New York Offshore Wind Updates

Offshore Wind Master Plan 2.0: Deep Water

The Offshore Wind Master Plan 2.0: Deep Water was initiated in 2022 to provide research and analysis to help the State to support federal processes, assess available and emerging technologies, and develop estimates of costs, benefits, and risks of floating offshore wind in the New York Bight. This process synthesized available information about wildlife distributions, oceanographic conditions, and human uses to understand regions of opportunity and risk for siting floating offshore wind projects. Draft environmental studies were shared with the E-TWG for feedback in September 2023, with anticipated final release by the end of 2023.

New York Phase 3 Offshore Wind Solicitation

NYSERDA received a robust response to New York's third offshore wind solicitation (ORECRFP22-1). Following the release of federal guidance regarding the Inflation Reduction Act, in July 2023, NYSERDA issued an addendum to ensure the most cost-effective outcome of the solicitation for ratepayers. With this process update, NYSERDA made an award announcement in October 2023 for three projects: Attentive Energy One, Community Offshore Wind, and Excelsior Wind.

Cable Corridor Constraints Assessment

In January 2023, NYSERDA released the Offshore Wind Cable Corridor Constraints Assessment, an analysis to better understand siting of offshore wind cables in New York State waters, at landfall, and along overland routes. The Assessment was a collaborative effort across New York State agencies and was shaped by stakeholder input.

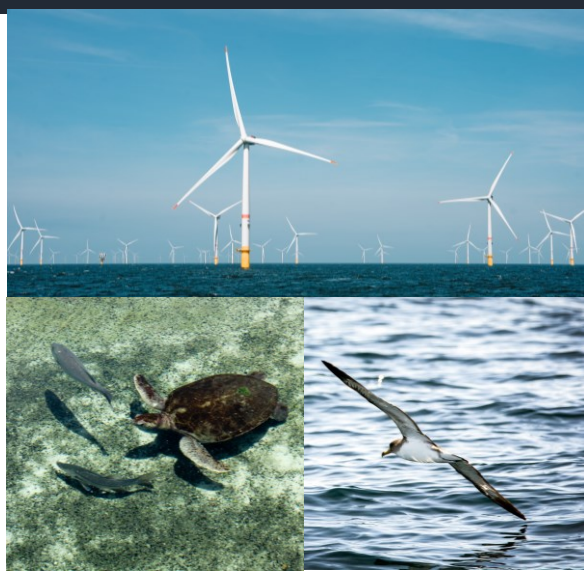
New Offshore Wind Research Proposals

In 2023, NYSERDA committed $2.5 million to support environmental and fisheries research related to offshore wind. Proposals focused on "Enhancement of Sustainable Fisheries," including efforts to promote a path towards co-existence with offshore wind, and "Changes in Biological Characteristics of Benthic Ecosystems," focused on understanding opportunities for ecological enhancement.

Regional Updates

Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative

The Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC) released their draft Science Plan for Wildlife, Habitat, and Offshore Wind Energy in U.S. Atlantic Waters for public comment in summer 2023. The Plan includes recommendations from expert subcommittees for data collection, research, and coordination efforts, and compiles information about ongoing and planned offshore wind and wildlife data collection and research. The RWSC sectors, including state and federal agencies, environmental nonprofits, and offshore wind companies, are working with the research community to identify research gaps and opportunities for collaboration.



Federal Activities

In the last year, BOEM identified wind energy areas in the Central Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, as well as a draft wind energy area in the Gulf of Maine and held the first offshore wind energy least auction in the Gulf of Mexico. In the New York Bight, BOEM completed its environmental review of the Empire Wind project with publication of the final Environmental Impact Statement. In the Pacific, BOEM released draft Wind Energy Areas in Oregon and held a lease sale off of California.

Commercial Activities

In 2023, the first two commercial-scale offshore wind projects in the U.S. began turbine construction. In June, Vineyard Wind began turbine installation for their 64-turbine project and South Fork Wind Farm began turbine installation for their 12-turbine project, both located off the coasts of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Project WOW

Funded by the U.S. Department of Energy and BOEM, Wildlife and Offshore Wind (WOW) is a trans-disciplinary collaboration of experts for the evaluation of the potential effects of offshore wind energy development on marine wildlife. The goal of the project is to provide a long-term, adaptive roadmap for efficient and effective assessment of the potential effects of offshore wind energy development on marine life. The project began data collection in 2023, including deploying GPS tracking devices on seabirds and satellite tagging and deployment of passive acoustic monitoring devices for whales.

Regional Fisheries Updates

NYSERDA continues to support multi-state effort for the establishment of a fair, equitable, and transparent regional fisheries compensatory mitigation fund. The State caucus includes 11 continuous coastal states from Maine to North Carolina working to advance this effort. A Request for Proposals is expected to be released shortly for the selection of a fund administrator who will develop, design, and implement the fund.

The Fisheries Technical Working Group (F-TWG) held a series of virtual open houses in June and July 2023 for members of the commercial and recreational fishing industries. The purpose of these virtual open houses was to synthesize and review previous comments the industry has provided on offshore wind and discuss with industry members how best to apply these and new comments to the New York Offshore Wind Master Plan 2.0 process for the advancement of deep water floating offshore wind energy development.