

Identifying Indicators of OFFSHORE WIND BENEFITS

An Analysis of the Effects of the Block Island Wind Farm on Rhode Island Recreation and Tourism Activities

Overview

The U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has contracted the University of Rhode Island (URI) to document the effects of the Block Island Wind Farm (BIWF) on recreation and tourism in Rhode Island. This information will be used to then create socioeconomic indicators to help regulators, industry, communities, and researchers measure the impacts of offshore renewable energy facilities, such as wind farms, on recreation and tourism activities in Rhode Island as well as potentially other places in the country.

History

This project is built upon URI's longstanding relationship in facilitating Rhode Island's extensive ocean planning process which provided for offshore renewable energy siting and permitting in state waters—ultimately resulting in the first offshore wind farm in the United States. In 2010, after a two-year community-based planning process that engaged URI scientists and outreach specialists with a wide spectrum of government, tribal, community, private sector and non-governmental organizations, the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council adopted the Rhode Island Ocean Special Area Management Plan (Ocean SAMP). This milestone regulatory document detailed management, use, protection and enhancement policies for resources in Rhode Island ocean waters and serves as an international model for coastal and ocean planning.



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The Project

Using diverse social science methods, including content analysis, participant observation and focus groups, an interdisciplinary group of URI social scientists and coastal management practitioners will provide BOEM with a technical approach to document the effects of the Block Island Wind Farm on recreation and tourism in the Rhode Island region. This analysis will build upon BOEM's completed and ongoing studies seeking to characterize the effects of offshore wind on recreation and tourism activities and will yield: (a) the first available empirical data on the effects of the Block Island Wind Farm on coastal recreation and tourism; (b) a suite of indicators that can be used to assess the potential effects of future offshore wind energy projects throughout the U.S.; and (c) a recommended subset of indicators that can be used to monitor the effects of the wind farm on Rhode Island's recreation and tourism activities moving forward. These three products will help BOEM plan for the installation and management of future offshore wind energy projects in federal waters. For this BOEM project, an advisory committee, made up of local industry and community representatives, regulators, and social scientists, ensures that the indicators are both rigorous and realistic, and respond to the needs and issues of communities and stakeholders.

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