Energy: 'I will fight to protect my family, our community'

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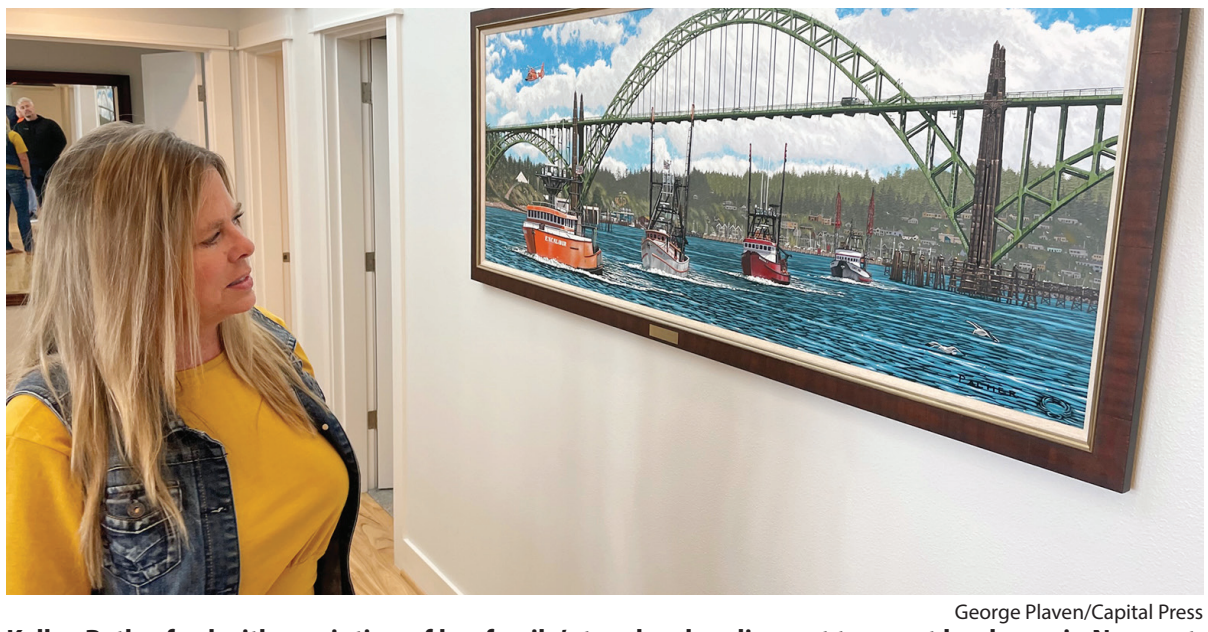
The push to harness wind energy in the Pacific Ocean has raised concerns within Oregon's $1.2 billion commercial fishing industry, with families such as the Retherfords worried it will limit access to highly productive fisheries and impact the marine ecosystem.

"There's got to be better options," Kelley Retherford said. "I will fight to protect my family, our community, our fisheries and our livelihoods."



George Plaven/Capital Press

Kelley Retherford with a painting of her family's trawlers heading out to sea at her home in Newport, Ore.

Chris Retherford

Christian Retherford harvests pink shrimp aboard the Coast Pride during a recent fishing trip off the Oregon coast.

George Plaven/Capital Press

Chris Retherford and his son, Christian, perform maintenance work aboard the Coastal Pride, a fishing trawler docked at the Port of Newport's commercial marina.

Development areas

On April 27, BOEM published details about two call areas designated for offshore wind development in Oregon.

The Coos Bay Call Area begins 13.8 miles offshore of Charleston, Ore., and is 67 miles long and 41 miles wide. The Brookings Call Area begins 13.8 miles offshore of Gold Beach, and is 46 miles long and 22 miles wide. Together, the areas encompass 3,759 square miles.

A 60-day comment period ended June 28 for developers to nominate locations within the two areas that would be best suited for wind projects.

At least one builder, Deep Blue Pacific Wind, nominated three such locations in its bid to build the Northwest's first floating offshore wind farm.

Deep Blue Pacific Wind is a joint venture between Simply Blue Group, an offshore wind developer based in Ireland, and TotalEnergies, a French energy company with its U.S. headquarters in Houston. In January, the venture hired Peter Cogswell as director of government and external affairs.

Cogswell is based in Portland, and is the former director of intergovernmental affairs for the Bonneville Power Administration, which markets electricity produced in the region. He said Oregon is particularly attractive for offshore wind due to a "world class" resource and policies to achieve 100% "clean" electricity by 2040.

Rather than being fixed to the seabed, turbines in the Pacific would have to be built on floating platforms to capture wind where it blows the hardest. Cogswell estimated it would take between 50 and 60 turbines to generate 1 gigawatt of energy.

"There's a lot to like about this resource," he said. "It's a very high (capacity) for a renewable form of generation."

Dueling processes

BOEM spokesman John Romero said the call areas are meant to identify where offshore wind "may be safely and responsibly developed," while soliciting feedback from the public.

Getting to this point took years of planning, Romero said. In 2010, then-Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski requested an intergovernmental task force be formed between BOEM and state agencies, led by the Department of Land Conservation and Development, to study offshore wind.

That process emphasized collaborating with local governments, tribes, coastal communities and other ocean users to identify the call areas, Romero said.

At the same time, Oregon lawmakers passed House Bill 3375 during the 2021 legislative session. The bill directs the state Department of Energy to analyze how it can integrate 3 gigawatts of offshore wind energy onto the electrical grid.

Jason Sierman, a senior policy analyst for the department, is leading the study, which is due back to the Legislature on Sept. 15.

Their goal, Sierman said, is to gain a better understanding of the challenges and benefits related to offshore wind.

"It would provide a great resource to meet those 100% clean energy targets," he said. "Three gigawatts is a big number, but in order to meet the 100% clean targets of all these western states, it's going to require hundreds of gigawatts of new resources to be built somewhere."

On the other hand, part of the challenge is where exactly to site the wind farms and how to mitigate their impact on ocean users, he said.

"Economic impact to the fishing economy is a big one I've heard a lot about," Sierman said. "Fishers may potentially have their customary ocean areas inaccessible — at least a fraction of them — from projects being potentially sited in these ocean areas."

Losing ground

Losing fishing grounds inside the call areas could be harmful to fishermen along the Oregon coast, said Heather Mann, executive director of the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative.

The areas are particularly bountiful due to the California Current, which provides a strong upwelling of water and nutrients for seafood. Mann estimated more than 25% of Pacific whiting harvested in the last decade has come from the two call areas proposed by BOEM.

Pacific whiting is the largest commercial fishery off the West Coast of the U.S. and British Columbia, Canada.

"The wind resource that the developers want is part of the (California) Current benefit that also creates great fishing opportunities," Mann said. "People have been harvesting (seafood) out of those two areas for decades and generations. They have been very productive fishing areas."

The Retherfords are one example, with three generations of the family taking to life on the ocean.

Aboard the Coastal Pride, Chris Retherford and his 16-year-old son, Christian, worked alongside the crew performing maintenance and filling the boat with diesel fuel before heading out to catch pink shrimp. Trips typically last one to four days, depending on the season.

On the bridge, where Retherford captains the ship, he flips on his automatic identification system, a computerized map that allows him to view other boats broadcasting their locations. The system shows fishing boats crossing through BOEM's designated call areas where large wind generators would be anchored.

"We go to where the fish are," he said. "Up and down the whole coast, the waters are alive and well. We use most of the waters out there."

Need for renewables

The drive for 100% clean energy in Oregon has raised the stakes for building new renewable energy projects statewide — including offshore wind generators.

House Bill 2021, signed by Gov. Kate Brown in 2021, requires retail electricity providers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from electricity sold to Oregon consumers by 80% by 2030, 90% by 2035 and 100% by 2040.

To get there, Nicole Hughes, executive director of Renewable Northwest, a Portland-based advocacy group, said offshore wind is vital.

Renewable Northwest was part of a coalition that published a study in July, analyzing what it will take for Oregon to achieve the benchmarks set under HB 2021.

"The one thing that was consistent across all scenarios was that offshore wind is needed," Hughes said. "Our view is that this is an amazing opportunity for the state, both as being needed to meet our clean energy goals but also as an economic opportunity."

Hughes said the push for offshore wind could give rise to a new industry in Oregon, providing manufacturing jobs and infrastructure in coastal communities that have been economically depressed with the decline of the timber industry over the last four decades.

"We need to make sure we're going to do it right so it benefits all Oregonians," she said.

Cogswell, with Deep Blue Pacific Wind, said he expects the agency to hold a lease auction later this year if everything goes according to schedule.

Across the country, developers spent $4.4 billion in February purchasing offshore wind energy rights in the New York Bight between Long Island and New Jersey.

Once a specific project is proposed, Cogswell said it will initiate a deeper environmental analysis before going ahead with construction. He said it would likely be a decade or longer before any wind turbines are in operation.

"You're going to have to balance the benefits with ... how they affect existing uses around fishing, and the effect they'll have on the environment," he said.

More questions

Caren Braby, marine resources program manager for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said that while the BOEM task force has exchanged plenty of data, more time is needed to comprehend what it all means for the ecosystem.

"I think it's fair to say there isn't a place within either of these call areas where something isn't happening," Braby said.

In addition to displacing fishermen, Braby said turbines might at least partially interrupt wind from its natural function of upwelling ocean water. She compared it to blowing on a cup of coffee, stirring cream up from the bottom of the cup.

"The turbines are, by design, capturing wind," she explained. "There's just one total of wind resource. You are, by definition, splitting it. It's not clear how much impact that will have, but it is measurable."

However, Braby also acknowledged that climate change is having an impact on the ocean, contributing to acidification and low-oxygen areas impacting key fisheries.

"It is with that frame that we look at renewable energy development proposals," Braby said, adding that ODFW is "very interested in alleviating some of our reliance on fossil fuels."

Slowing down

Mann, with the Midwater Trawlers Co-op, said she hopes the industry's concerns will prompt state agencies and BOEM to slow down their process.

"We see an opportunity with HB 3375 to actually understand what these risks and benefits are," she said. "I feel confident that if the study comes out and is truthful, that legislators will look at that say, 'Wow, this is akin to the oil and gas exploration we banned.'"

Several state and federal lawmakers are also urging BOEM to slow down and fully consider impacts on coastal communities before moving forward with leasing.

In a letter to BOEM Director Amanda Lefton, Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden and Rep. Peter DeFazio said the Coos Bay and Brookings call areas should be moved beyond a depth of 1,300 meters to minimize displacing commercial fishing.

"Fishing grounds have been steadily shrinking for decades and coastal communities up and down the Pacific coast continue to suffer economic and cultural loss," they wrote.

Further limiting fishing grounds in the call areas "could spell economic disaster for these towns," the letter continued.

Kelley Retherford said the fishing industry will continue to push back against the call areas, fighting for their livelihoods.

"We don't want new jobs. We don't want a different career," Retherford said. "We spent our lives as a fishing family, and we're going to spend our future as a fishing family. We will survive, and we will be resilient."

Costs: Fuel cost 67% more this May than it did in May of 2021

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when compared to a year ago. The May 2022 cost of fertilizer was 77% higher than it was in May 2021.

Chemical costs remained static between April and May of 2022, but prices this May were 33% higher than last May.

The May fuel index was up 6% from April, and fuel cost 67% more this May than it did in May of 2021. USDA data shows that, compared to the month prior, May prices were higher for diesel and gasoline but lower for LP gas.

Machinery in May cost 0.6% less than it did in April — one of the few areas where input costs decreased. Prices slightly declined for tractors, self-propelled machines and other machinery. However, machinery costs were 19% higher than a year ago.

In a statement this week, American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall said American farmers and ranchers continue to "grapple with increased costs of growing food and fiber."

"While some ranchers are seeing increases in commodity prices, their gains are being eaten up by higher expenses," said Duvall. "Many farmers and ranchers are concerned they won't be able to break even, much less make a profit."

Irrigators: BiOps updated every five years or as new scientific information is available

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change the landscape and geomorphology in the Klamath River," Person said.

Under the Endangered Species Act, Reclamation is required to consult with both the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure the Klamath Project does not jeopardize the survival of imperiled fish.

The resulting Biological Opinions, or BiOps, dictate project operations for roughly 200,000 acres of farmland straddling Southern Oregon and Northern California.

There are two BiOps for the Klamath Project — one for coho salmon in the lower Klamath River, and one for Lost River and shortnose suckers in Upper Klamath Lake. The suckers are also known as C'waam and Koptu by the Klamath Tribes.

BiOps are typically updated every five years or as new scientific information is available, Person said. However, the most recent BiOps were scrapped in 2019 after the agencies received "erroneous data" from an outside consultant during their development.

The Yurok Tribe, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations and Institute for Fisheries Resources had also sued the agencies for not providing enough water in the Klamath River to prevent an outbreak of C. shasta infecting salmon. The fish-killing parasite thrives in slow-moving, warm water.

In response, Reclamation adopted the interim operations plan to stay in compliance with the ESA while new BiOps take shape. But that too has been much maligned.

George Plaven/Capital Press File

Water flows from Upper Klamath Lake into the A Canal, part of the Klamath Project.

Three consecutive years of record drought have only exacerbated tensions in the basin. This year's water diversions for the Klamath Project are just 15% of full demand for irrigators, while the Project was shut down entirely in 2021.

The Klamath Tribes, meanwhile, are suing the government for failing to meet minimum water levels in Upper Klamath Lake needed to provide shoreline spawning habitat for suckers.

In a letter sent June 17 to Ernest Conant, Reclamation's regional director, the Klamath Water Users Association outlined deficiencies in the interim operations plan, claiming "it is based on erroneous data, flawed hydrologic assumptions and a proposed action that does not comport with current operations."

"The three years of attempted operation under the (plan) has been a period of chaotic, ad hoc decision-making," the letter states. "KWUA has, for well over a year, emphasized the lack of any coherent regulatory construct for the IOP. That point is further underscored by the fact that the IOP has required Reclamation to do things that literally are impossible."

Officials from the Interior Department wrapped up a two-day visit to the Klamath Basin on June 29 during which they heard concerns raised by both the irrigators and tribes.

Person said the primary assertion is that the interim operations plan simply does not work in such extreme drought, when there is so little water available in the system.

Rather than extend the interim plan pending assessments for post-dam removal, Person said stakeholders asked if agencies can do annual consultations each year to determine project supplies and protections for endangered fish.

"Reclamation is still evaluating that request," Person said. "There will be some follow-up discussions."