

Offshore wind: ‘We go to where the fish are’

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In late April, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management 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 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 in June for developers to nominate locations within the two areas that would be best suited for wind projects.

At least one bidder, 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 U.S. headquarters in Houston. In January, the venture hired Peter Cogswell as director of government and external affairs.

Cogswell, based in Portland, 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

John Romero, a spokesman for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, 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-Gov. Ted Kulongoski requested an intergovernmental task force be formed between the bureau 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 law 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 by mid-September.

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 fishing grounds inside the call areas could be harmful to fishermen along the Oregon Coast, said Heather Mann, the 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 the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

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 the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management 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 into law 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, the 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 the new law.

“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 past 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.

Caren Braby, a marine resources program manager for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said that while the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management 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 bot-

tom 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 the Department of Fish and Wildlife is “very interested in alleviating some of our reliance on fossil fuels.”

Mann, with the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, said she hopes the industry’s concerns will prompt state agencies and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management 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 the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to slow down and fully consider impacts on coastal communities before moving forward with leasing.

In a letter to Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Director Amanda Lefton, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. 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,” the Oregon Democrats 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.”



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Vacation rentals have created problems in neighborhoods such as Cove Beach.

Ordinance: Vacation rentals are an unsettled issue on the Oregon Coast

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gone through the entire process yet,” Bohn told commissioners.

The idea of limiting the number of vacation rentals convinced Commissioner Pamela Wev, who had voted against the first reading of the ordinance, to approve the second reading last month.

Vacation rentals are an unsettled issue on the Oregon Coast. The ventures attract tourists and local businesses and local governments enjoy the economic benefits. But critics argue that the behavior of out-of-towners and their impact on the environment degrades the quality of life in some neighborhoods.

Lincoln County voters passed a ballot measure last year to phase out vacation rentals in unincorporated residential zones over five years. A challenge to the measure is under review by the state Land Use Board of Appeals.

Where Lincoln County’s situation involves a voter initiative proposing a new ordinance, in Clatsop County, the prospective petition, if it lands on the ballot, would repeal an existing ordinance, Joanna Lyons-Antley, the county counsel, clarified on Wednesday.

The recent moves around vacation rentals in Clatsop County come after about two dozen public meetings on the issue over three years. The discussion began in late

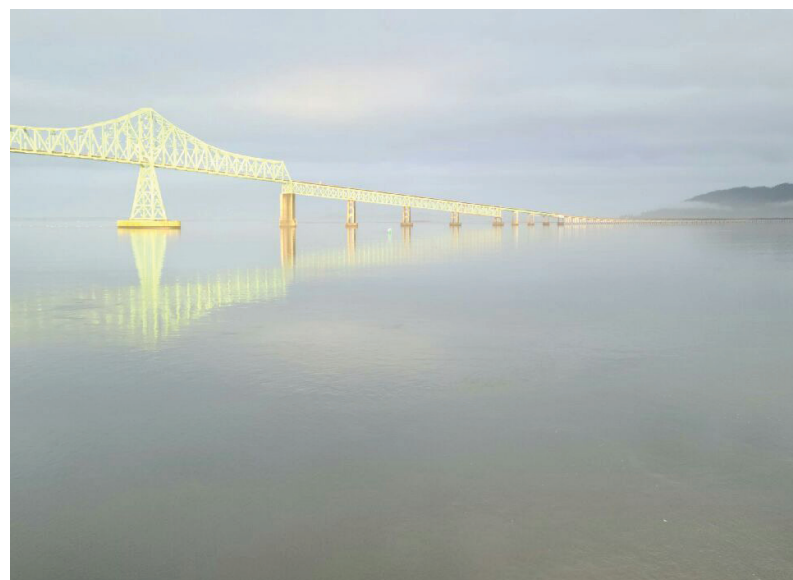
2019, when Cove Beach residents raised concerns about neighborhood livability. About a third of the dwellings in that neighborhood are vacation rentals.

In April, county commissioners voted to amend the operating standards for vacation rentals outside of Arch Cape. The updated standards, contained in the county code, banned permit transfers, shortened permit length, created rules around occupancy and required that rental owners post good-neighbor flyers that address parking, speed limits, quiet hours and other conduct-based concerns.

Since a moratorium was first imposed last summer, the county hasn’t issued any new vacation rental permits, giving the county time to figure out how to regulate the controversial enterprises. The twice-extended freeze is set to expire in late August.

That residents in Astoria, Warrenton, Gearhart, Seaside and Cannon Beach, which have their own vacation rental rules, could vote on an issue that affects only unincorporated areas may cause confusion. Commissioner Lianne Thompson said on Wednesday that communication on this point could be challenging.

Bohn reminded the commission that the process had just begun. “The good news, I guess, if you want to see it, is that we do have time,” he said.



Janet Piippo

Janet Piippo has posted photos to Astoria Riverwalk fans, a Facebook group.

Piippo: ‘We have to have change — whether it’s good or bad — things have to change’

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After joining Facebook, Piippo started using her cellphone camera to take photos of the Columbia River from her window and along the Astoria Riverwalk.

She became a frequent contributor to Astoria Riverwalk fans, a Facebook group with more than 4,500 members. Some of her photos have received hundreds of likes and dozens of comments.

“Really, it’s just a pastime for me,” Piippo said. “I love doing it, and I wish more people would get into it.”

Sharing her photos has become a way for her to stay connected with people during the coronavirus pandemic.

“COVID took away kind of two years from our lives ... and especially older people,” Piippo said. “I feel like I’m getting some of it back by this. I mean, it’s just rewarding to hear some of the comments that people put in and how much they love Astoria.”

She said it has helped her connect with former classmates who live out of state who got in touch

with her after seeing her photos. She also enjoys when people knowledgeable about boats jump into the comment section when she is curious to learn something about a particular ship passing by.

“It brings everybody closer, I think,” she said.

Piippo recalled growing up in Astoria and how much the riverfront has changed over the years.

She remembers going to the canneries with her friends. At one, they would take a wood block with a fishing line and fish for suckers through holes in the floor.

At another, they would help a friend’s mother clean up the cafeteria in exchange for free lunch. She recalled the numerous food fights.

“It was fun growing up here,” Piippo said. She said people did not always think Astoria was a great place to grow up and many could not wait to leave.

“It’s certainly not what I grew up with,” Piippo said of the city today. “And things don’t stay the same — they can’t. We have to have change — whether it’s good or bad — things have to change.”