

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AREA IDENTIFICATION

Commercial Wind Energy Leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf Offshore North Carolina

Aug. 7, 2014

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is proceeding with competitive commercial wind energy leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) offshore North Carolina, as set forth by 30 CFR 585.211 through 585.225. The next step in the competitive leasing process, and the purpose of this announcement, is Area Identification. BOEM has defined three Wind Energy Areas (WEAs) offshore North Carolina (Figure 1). The Kitty Hawk WEA begins about 24 nautical miles (nm) from shore and extends approximately 25.7 nm in a general southeast direction at its widest point. Its seaward extent ranges from 13.5 nm in the north to .6 nm in the south. It contains approximately 21.5 OCS blocks (122,405 acres). The Wilmington West WEA begins about 10 nm from shore and extends approximately 12.3 nm in an east-west direction at its widest point. It contains just over 9 OCS blocks (approximately 51,595 acres). The Wilmington East WEA begins about 15 nm from Bald Head Island at its closest point and extends approximately 18 nm in the southeast direction at its widest point. It contains approximately 25 OCS blocks (133,590 acres).

All three WEAs will be considered for leasing and approval of site assessment plans as the proposed action under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4370f). BOEM also has identified an alternative to the proposed action that would exclude one of the WEAs from consideration for lease issuance and approval of site assessment activities, and another alternative that would establish seasonal restrictions on certain site characterization activities. This announcement also identifies mitigation measures to be considered further in the NEPA document.

On December 13, 2012, BOEM published in the *Federal Register* the *Commercial Leasing for Wind Power on the Outer Continental Shelf Offshore North Carolina—Call for Information and Nominations* (Call) (77 FR 74204-74213) and *Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment* (NOI) (77 FR 74218-74220).

Comments on the Call and NOI and BOEM studies identified multiple space use conflicts within the Call areas. BOEM worked closely with Federal, state, local and industry stakeholders to avoid existing high use and sensitive resource areas while maximizing areas for offshore wind development. BOEM made the following exclusions from the Call areas prior to defining the three WEAs.

- **Kitty Hawk WEA.** Call Area Kitty Hawk included certain areas that overlapped with traditional shipping routes used by both tug and barge and deep draft (primarily container ships) vessels. BOEM worked closely with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and the maritime community to modify Call Areas Kitty Hawk and Wilmington East in an effort to reduce potential conflicts with vessel navigation and safety. In addition, the National Park Service requested that areas within 33.7 nm of Bodie Island Lighthouse be excluded from development, and the Town of Kitty Hawk passed a resolution requesting that BOEM exclude areas within 20 nm of the coast from development. In response to these concerns, areas within 33.7 nm of Bodie Island Lighthouse and 24 nm from the coastline have been excluded from inclusion in the Kitty Hawk WEA (Figure 2).

- **Wilmington West WEA.** During public open houses held in 2013, BOEM presented the results of our North Carolina Visual Simulation Study. In response, stakeholders expressed concern about the visual impacts of future wind energy development in Call Area Wilmington West during both the day and night time. In response to these concerns, areas within 10 nm of the coastline have not been included as part of the Wilmington West WEA (Figure 3). Although portions of lease blocks included in the WEA are within 10 nm of shore, BOEM will not allow the installation of turbines within those areas.
- **Wilmington East WEA.** Call Area Wilmington East included certain areas that overlapped with traditional shipping routes used by both tug and barge and deep draft (primarily container ships) vessels, many of which utilize the Port of Wilmington. BOEM has worked closely with the USCG and the maritime community to modify the Call Area in an effort to minimize impacts to vessels utilizing the Port of Wilmington while still allowing for offshore wind development. In addition, through an ongoing cooperative agreement with UNC Chapel Hill and an interagency agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), areas of high topographic relief and patches of consolidated hard bottom, both of which were found to be correlated with high fish densities, were identified in the Call Area. In response to these navigational safety concerns and the presence of sensitive habitat, BOEM excluded these areas from inclusion in the Wilmington East WEA (Figure 4).

Alternatives to the proposed action (Alternative A) include:

- Elimination of Wilmington West area due to potential impacts to migrating North Atlantic right whales (Alternative B).
- Establishment of seasonal restrictions on site characterization activities, specifically geological and geotechnical surveys, during peak migration of North Atlantic right whales (November 1 – April 30) (Alternative C).

The agency is currently only considering the issuance of leases and approval of site assessment plans in these WEAs. BOEM is not considering, and the EA will not support, any decision(s) regarding the construction and operation of wind energy facilities on leases which will potentially be issued in these WEAs. If, after leases are issued, a lessee proposes to construct a commercial wind energy facility, it would submit a construction and operations plan. If and when BOEM receives such a plan, it would prepare a site-specific NEPA document for the project proposed, which would include the lessee's proposed transmission line(s) to shore. These cable routes would underlie areas outside of the WEAs, and may include areas beneath the areas with conflicts from vessel traffic, visual impacts, hard bottom, and fishing.

BOEM has also identified mitigation measures that may reduce the potential for adverse impacts to North Atlantic right whales, other marine mammals, and sea turtles. Such measures include vessel speed restrictions and enhanced monitoring. These measures, and possibly others, will be analyzed in the EA, and if adopted, could be imposed as binding requirements in the form of stipulations in the lease instrument and/or conditions of approval of a site assessment plan. Based upon consultations with Federal agencies, states, local governments, and affected Indian tribes and public comments received, BOEM will continue to consider additional measures that may reduce the potential for adverse environmental consequences, and may identify other issues to be considered in the EA.

Figure 1. Wind Energy Areas identified offshore North Carolina for analysis as the Proposed Action (Alternative A) in the EA.

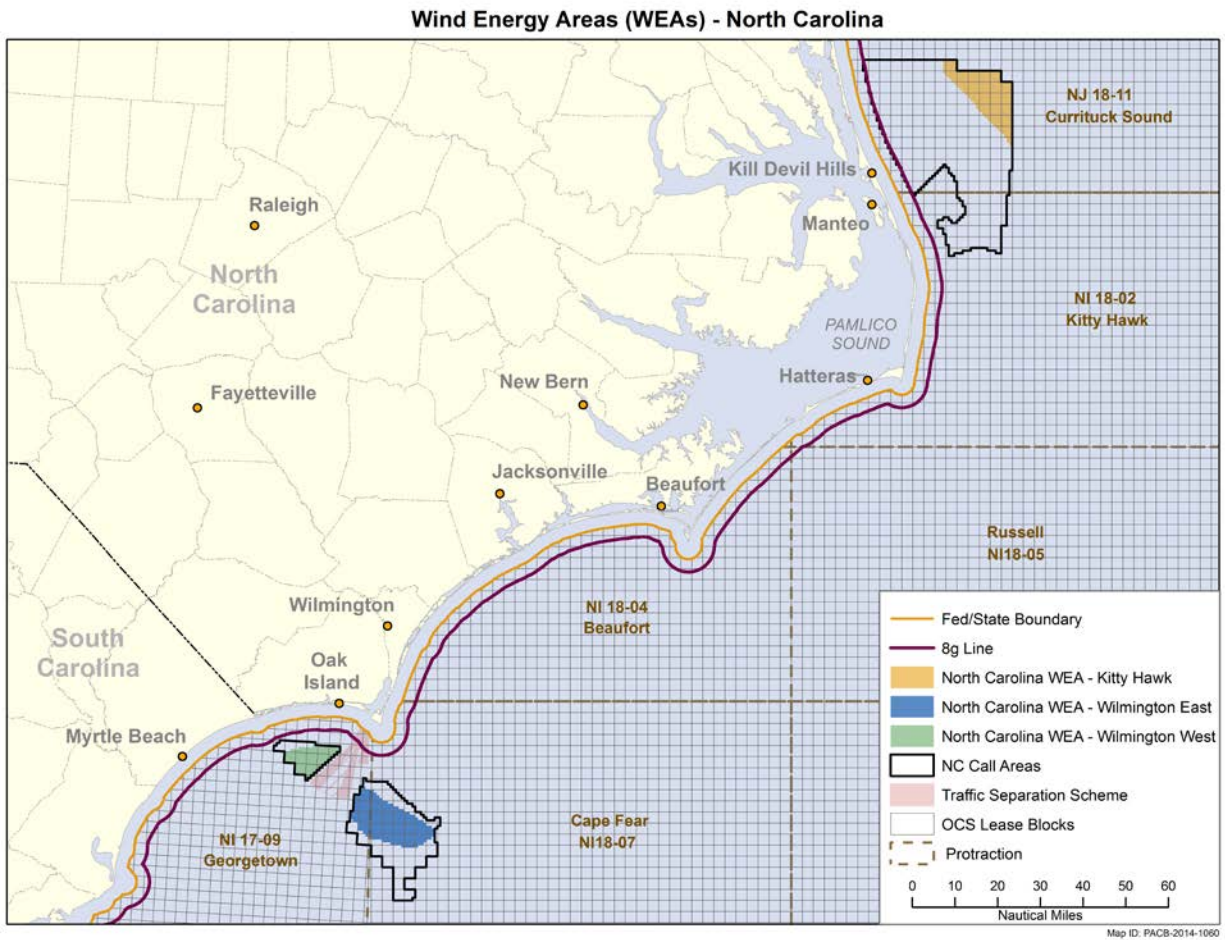


Figure 2. North Carolina Wind Energy Area Kitty Hawk

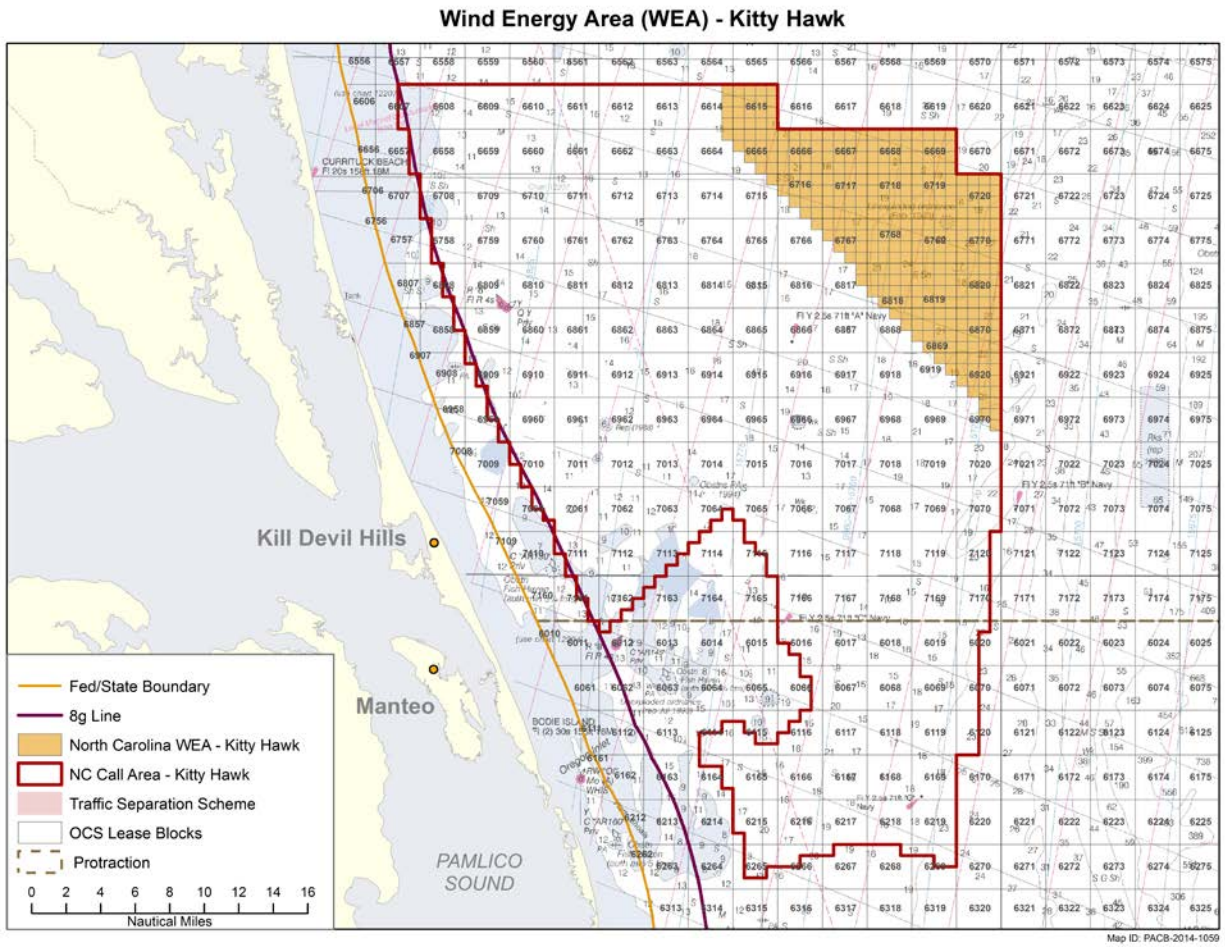


Figure 3. North Carolina Wind Energy Area Wilmington West

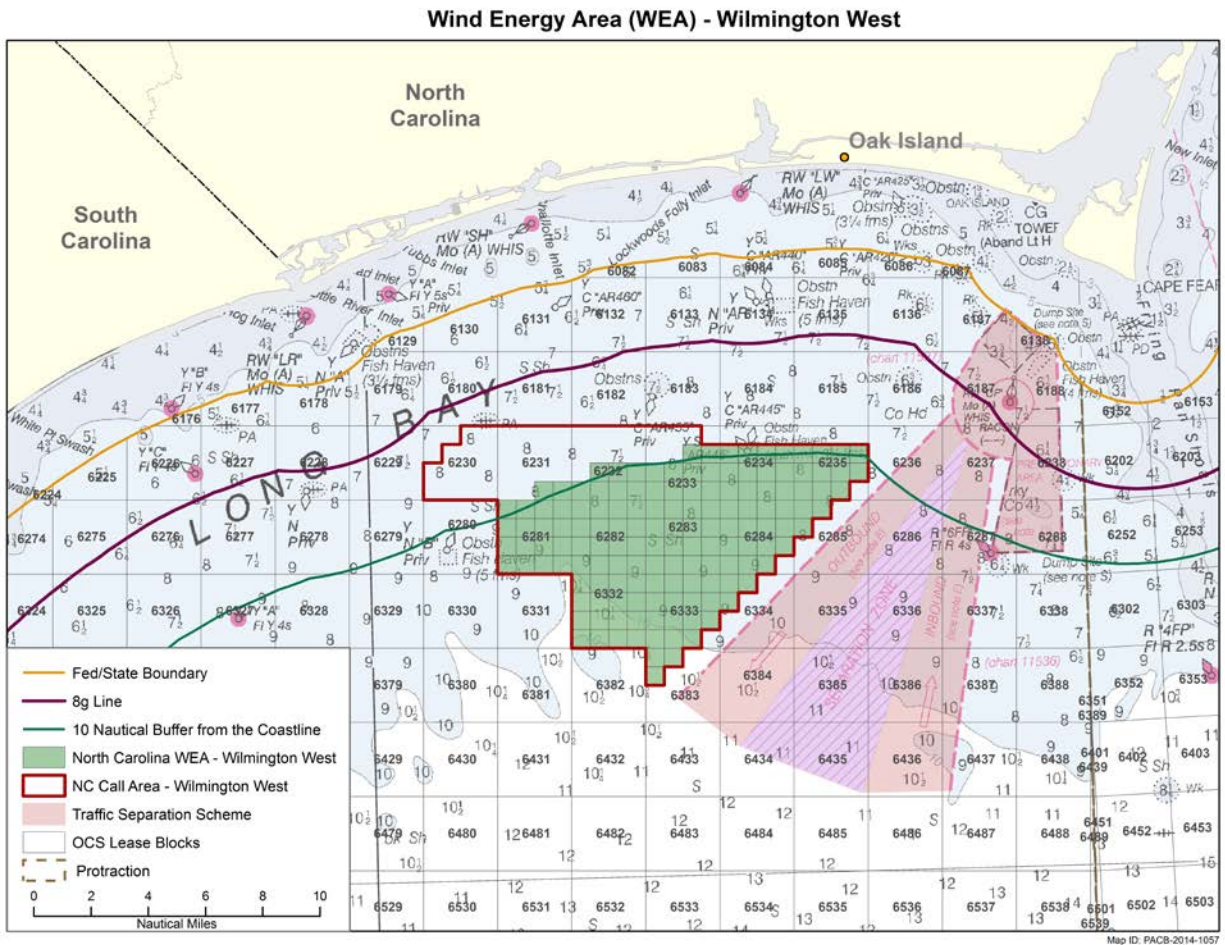


Figure 4. North Carolina Wind Energy Area Wilmington East

