

Federal officials to meet with Oregonians about controversial offshore wind energy projects

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Federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management officials will meet with Oregonians concerned or curious about potential floating offshore wind energy projects following public and political outcry.

Officials will host three in-person meetings in Coos Bay, Gold Beach, and Brookings on Sept. 26, 27 and 28. The agency also doubled the public comment period from 30 to 60 days, until Oct. 16.

Generating clean energy from wind turbines floating in the Pacific Ocean is part of state and federal plans to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions contributing to global climate change. But some residents of the Oregon Coast and several tribal nations are concerned about the potential impact to marine life, fisheries and the industries and people who depend on them.

Coos Bay and Brookings are closest to the two swaths of Pacific Ocean identified by the ocean energy agency as ideal for large wind turbines that would float about 18 to 32 miles from land. Energy generated across the 344 square miles of open ocean identified for the projects could power nearly 200,000 homes. The federal agency would like to host an auction by year's end, allowing companies interested in developing ocean wind energy to bid on leases for the sites. A similar auction in California in 2022 brought in \$757 million in winning bids for four companies.

Brad Kneaper, chair of the tribal council of the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians said he supports green energy development, but he said the current plans for projects along the Oregon Coast would risk the health of fisheries and the local fishing industry.

“We cannot support offshore wind development until we are provided assurance that it will do good and not harm the tribe, its members and the greater community,” he said in a statement.

The decision to host the in-person meetings about the projects, and to double the standard 30-day comment period required of such plans, follows pressure from Gov. Tina Kotek and U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Oregon’s congressional Reps. Suzanne Bonamici and Val Hoyle.

Submit comments online **here** through Oct. 16.

The group sent two letters to Elizabeth Klein, the ocean energy agency’s director, in June and August asking the bureau to pause the process of identifying and leasing offshore wind areas until there was more collaboration with stakeholders.

“Renewable energy is an essential piece of the strategy to combat the climate crisis. However, local communities and fishermen have to be at the center for decisions about offshore wind projects that affect their livelihoods,” Wyden said in a statement.

The federal agency and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development have held more than 75 meetings with Oregonians about offshore wind development since 2021. These include meetings with coastal communities, the public, elected officials, county commissioners, Oregon seafood commodity commissions, tribal nations, representatives from the wind industry, research and environmental organizations, the Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council and the Pacific Fishery Management Council.

The public can comment at a Sept. 18 virtual meeting of the Oregon Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force. The group has met more than 10 times since 2011 and is made up of tribal, federal state, and local government officials. On Sept. 21, the ocean energy agency will also host a webinar for anyone interested in learning more about its data on offshore wind energy generation and the health of fisheries.

Follow developments at currypilot.com and in the Wednesday print version of The Pilot.

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