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Business

Feds begin move to OK wind farms off Oahu

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The U.S. Interior Department is trying to gauge the wind industry's interest in leasing offshore areas of Oahu to build an energy project such as the one pictured here in the North Sea off the village of Blavandshuk, Denmark.

The Obama administration took the first step Wednesday toward leasing two offshore Oahu areas to the wind industry for renewable energy projects.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell issued "a call for information and nominations to gauge the wind industry's interest in commercial wind leases in two areas offshore

Oahu.”

Jewell said in a news release the call is a milestone in President Barack Obama’s plan to support renewable energy across the country.

“Hawaii has important offshore wind energy potential,” Jewell said. “We will continue our work with stakeholders across the spectrum to create a path forward for sustainable offshore energy development in the right places with the lowest conflicts across the Aloha State.”

The move comes after the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management held a public meeting in May to discuss three wind lease requests that focus on two spots approximately 12 to 17 miles off Oahu’s shores. The meeting was part of the agency’s process of reviewing the unsolicited bids.

The two companies that initially threw their hats in the ring for the areas are AW Hawaii Wind LLC, a subsidiary of Danish-based Alpha Wind Energy, and Progression Energy LLC. AW Hawaii wants to build two projects: an Oahu South project, consisting of 51 floating wind turbines 17 miles south of Diamond Head, and the 51-turbine Oahu Northwest project 12 miles northwest of Kaena Point. Oregon-based Progression Energy LLC wants to bring 50 turbines to a site 15 miles off Oahu’s South Shore.

Building approximately 100 turbines between the two areas would provide about 800 megawatts of renewable power — the same amount Hawaiian Electric Co. said it needs to support Oahu’s energy needs and reach the state’s goal of getting 100 percent of its power generation from renewable energy.

After making the announcement Wednesday, BOEM representatives contacted groups in Hawaii. While reviewing the proposals, the BOEM created the Hawaii Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force.

The task force includes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the Federal Aviation Administration, Honolulu Airports District Office; the state Department of Land and Natural Resources; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Pacific Region; Hawaii National Marine Renewable Energy; and U.S. Marine Corps Forces.

“This announcement represents a significant step in facilitating the responsible development of offshore renewable energy to power homes and businesses on the island of Oahu,” said BOEM Director Abigail Ross Hopper in a statement. “We are working with the state of Hawaii, industry and a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that commercial wind leasing is done in a transparent manner that engages stakeholders throughout the process.”

The call also solicits public comment on site conditions, resources and other uses in and near those areas.

Hawaii residents have voiced concerns about the impact two potential offshore wind

farms could have on fishing and a culturally significant site.

The BOEM said it “will also hold public information meetings to provide additional opportunities for the public to comment and learn more about the process.”

For additional information about offshore wind projects, visit boem.gov/Hawaii.