

First commercial-scale offshore wind farm in the US gets federal approval

The first commercial-scale offshore wind project in the US just got the green light from the Biden administration. The approval has the potential to dramatically grow the nation's wind energy sector after years of regulatory limbo for proposed offshore projects.

Big ambitions for offshore wind

The Interior Department (DOI) granted the Vineyard Wind project permission to install up to 84 turbines off the coast of Massachusetts. Once completed, the project will be able to generate up to 800 megawatts (MW), enough electricity for 400,000 homes. That's a dramatic scaling up of existing offshore wind capacity in the US. There are currently only two small developments off the East Coast and those can only generate a combined 42 megawatts of electricity.

The Biden administration has big ambitions for offshore wind. It set a goal of getting 30,000 MW of energy from offshore wind by 2030. That's part of a bigger plan to tackle climate change by reaching 100 percent clean electricity by 2035.

"A clean energy future is within our grasp in the United States. The approval of this project is an important step toward advancing the Administration's goals to create good-paying union jobs while combatting climate change and powering our nation," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in a statement.

Europe is already ahead of the game, with more than 25,000 MW

of offshore wind capacity now. Globally, wind and solar energy are taking off when it comes to electricity generation. New renewable energy capacity made up 90 percent of the global power sector's growth in 2020 and is expected to do so again in 2021 and 2022, according to a market update released today by the International Energy Agency.

Globally, wind and solar energy are taking off

Vineyard Wind first submitted its construction and operations plan for federal approval in 2017, although plans for the project have been in the works since 2009. Now that the project has been greenlit, it's expected to be operational by 2023, according to the project's developers, Avangrid Renewables and Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners.

Vineyard Wind receiving a Record of Decision from the DOI's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is likely a good sign for more than a dozen other offshore wind projects awaiting federal approval. It's good news for adjacent industries, too, including shipbuilding. There's been a "chicken and egg" situation for the offshore wind industry: it needs specialized vessels to construct new projects, but shipbuilders were hesitant to invest in new builds until major projects received permits to move forward. Vineyard Wind's approval could be wind in the sails to get both industries really moving.

<https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/11/22430981/offshore-wind-farm-commercial-scale-federal-approval-vineyard-wind-massachusetts>