



# **Environmental Assessment for Commercial Wind Lease Issuance and Site Assessment Activities Offshore North Carolina**

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Brian Krevor, Environmental Protection Specialist

Office of Renewable Energy Programs  
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

# Outline

- National Environmental Policy Act
- Overview of the Environmental Assessment (EA)
  - Proposed Action and Alternatives
  - Impact Producing Factors and Activities
  - Resources Considered
  - Standard Operating Conditions
  - Consultations
- EA and Comments Received
- Finding of No Significant Impact
- Next Steps

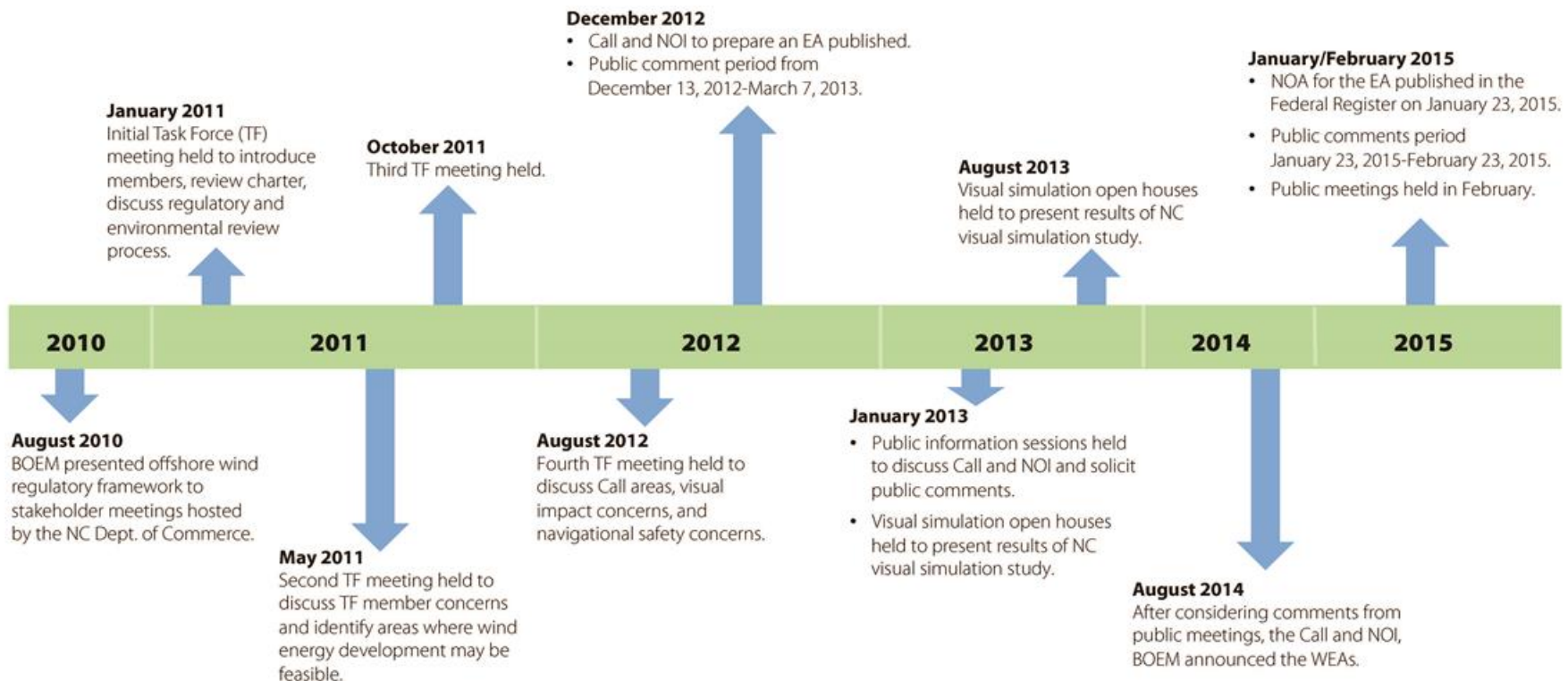
# National Environmental Policy Act

- Established by Congress in 1969.
- Two primary purposes:
  - Informed decisions
  - Public involvement
- To determine if an action has the potential to affect the quality of the human environment, an agency may:
  - Apply a Categorical Exclusion;
  - Prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA); or
  - Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

# What is an Environmental Assessment (EA)?

- An EA is a concise public document which:
  - Briefly provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS);
  - Aids an agency's compliance with NEPA when no EIS is necessary (better alternatives and mitigation measures) and; and
  - Facilitates preparation of an EIS when one is necessary.

# Timeline



# Proposed Action (Alternative A): What was considered?

- Lease issuance of all three Wind Energy Areas (WEAs)
- Associated site characterization surveys
- Subsequent site assessment activities (e.g., construction and operation of meteorological towers and/or buoys)



# Proposed Action:

## What was NOT Considered?

- Installation, operation, and decommissioning of a commercial wind energy facility
- If an eventual lessee were to submit a construction and operations plan (COP), BOEM would conduct a project specific environmental analysis, likely an EIS



# Other Alternatives Considered

Alternative B	Removal of Wilmington West WEA due to migrating North Atlantic right whales
Alternative C	Prohibits high resolution geological and geophysical survey activities from November 1 - April 30 due to migration patterns of North Atlantic right whales
Alternative D	No action



# Impact Producing Factors

- Vessel Traffic
- Noise (Pile Driving, Surveys)
- Vessel Collisions/Allisions
- Bottom Disturbance
- Emissions and Discharges
- Lighting
- Visual and Aesthetic Interference



# Environmental and Socioeconomic Resources Considered

- Physical
  - Air Quality
  - Water Quality
- Biological
  - Marine Mammals
  - Sea Turtles
  - Fish and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)
  - Coastal Habitats
  - Benthic Resources
  - Avian and Bat Species
- Socioeconomic
  - Aesthetics and Visual Resources
  - Commercial and Recreational Fishing
  - Cultural Resources
  - Military Uses
  - Environmental Justice
  - Land Use and Coastal Infrastructure
  - Tourism and Recreation
  - Demographics and Employment

# Standard Operating Conditions

- Appendix B of the EA
- Based on consultations with NOAA NMFS and FWS
- Part of the proposed action or “in place”
- Developed to reduce or eliminate the potential for environmental risks
- Enforced through lease stipulations or terms and conditions of plan approval

# Consultations

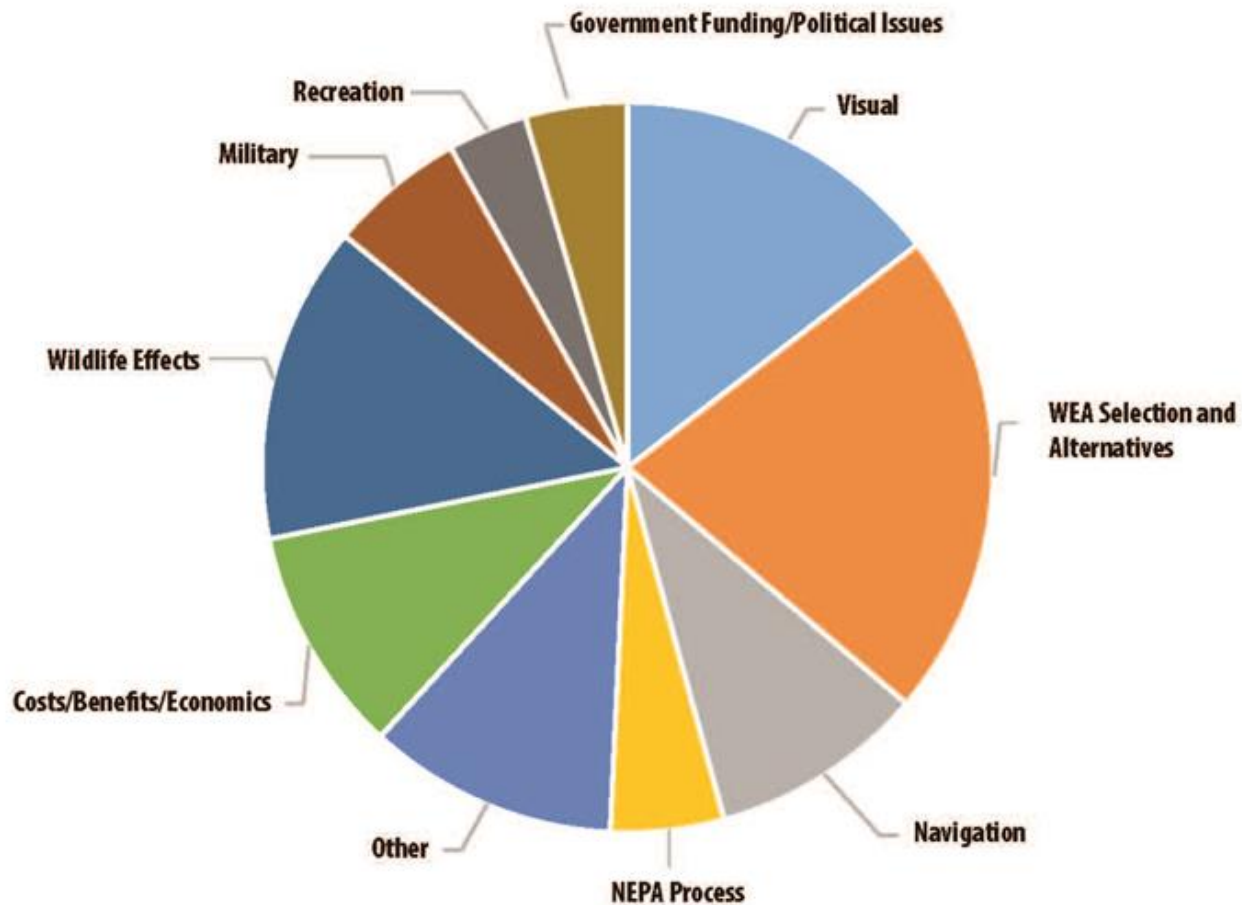
- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)
- Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Essential Fish Habitat (EFH))



# North Carolina Environmental Assessment

- EA published January 23, 2015
  - 30-day public comment period
- Public meetings held (February 9-12, 2015)
  - Kitty Hawk, Wilmington, and Carolina Shores
- 199 comments received
  - Can be viewed at <http://www.regulations.gov/>  
(search docket ID BOEM-2015-0001)

## Comments Received on EA Categorized by Topic





# EA Comments

- In scope comments:
  - Standard Operating Conditions
  - Proposed expansion of North Atlantic right whale critical habitat (survey and site assessment related impacts)
  - Selection of Proposed Action and Alternatives
  - Pile driving impacts to wildlife (especially marine mammals)
  - Survey and vessel traffic impacts to wildlife
- Out of scope comments:
  - Support or opposition to commercial offshore wind development
  - Environmental or visual impacts of an offshore wind facility
  - Impacts to navigation and military operations from an offshore wind facility
  - Economics costs/benefits of an offshore wind facility
  - Impacts of a transmission cable to shore



# Revised North Carolina EA

- All comments were carefully considered and BOEM published a revised EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on September 17, 2015
- Comments are addressed in Section 5.1.3 of the revised EA
- New information incorporated into revised EA:
  - Proposed North Atlantic right whale critical habitat expansion
  - Bird data
  - Results of North Carolina cooperative agreement

# Finding of No Significant Impact

- For most resources, reasonably foreseeable impacts were negligible to minor.
- Potential moderate impacts identified for marine mammals and sea turtles
  - Only result from noise related to pile driving (i.e., meteorological tower construction)
  - SOCs developed to minimize or eliminate these potential impacts
- No reasonably foreseeable significant impacts are expected to occur as a result of the proposed action
- An EIS is not required for lease issuance and approval of site assessment

# Next Steps:

## Site Assessment Plans (SAPs)

- Are proposed activities adequately covered by NC EA and consultations?
- Unless effects are significantly different, no additional NEPA required
- Section 7 ESA consultation for meteorological tower construction (NMFS)
- NHPA Section 106 consultation required
  - 30-day consulting party review period of finding document (per Programmatic Agreement)



# Next Steps: Construction and Operations Plans (COPs)

- Submitted after SAP
- BOEM will conduct a site/project specific environmental review (most likely an EIS) and consultations
- Additional opportunities for public comment
  - Scoping notice and meetings
  - Minimum 45-day public comment period on draft EIS



# Questions?

Brian Krevor, Environmental Protection Specialist

[Brian.Krevor@boem.gov](mailto:Brian.Krevor@boem.gov)

703-787-1346