

Environmental Studies Program: Ongoing Studies

Study Area: North Atlantic

Administered By: Office of Renewable Energy Programs

Title: Analysis of the Effects of the Block Island Wind Farm on Rhode Island Recreation and Tourism Activities

BOEM Information Need(s) to be Addressed: Understanding how tourism may be impacted by the development of offshore wind energy facilities is important to assess under BOEM's National Environmental Policy Act responsibilities. It has been suggested that tourists and recreationalists may change their behavior in selecting destinations due to the visibility of an offshore wind energy facility. The study will provide empirical data regarding the potential positive and negatives effects of the first U.S. offshore wind farm on two important coastal economic sectors—tourism and recreation. Such data will be valuable to validate or challenge concerns raised by state and local governments about potential impacts to their coastal economies.

Total Cost: \$311,000

Period of Performance: FY 2017-2019

Conducting Organization: University of Rhode Island

Principal Investigator: [Jennifer McCann](#)

BOEM Contact: [Amy Stillings](#)

Description:

Background: BOEM has completed a baseline study regarding the relative importance of tourism and recreation to Atlantic coastal counties (ICF, 2012). Potential impacts to recreation and tourism are largely dependent on the public's perception of wind facilities. In 2016, BOEM funded a survey to collect data regarding public attitudes and values about offshore wind using visual simulations at varying distances from shore. Preliminary results indicate some visitors would change location if an offshore facility is visible, while another group of visitors would be attracted to the beach (Parsons, 2016). Studies from Europe indicate that public opinion becomes more positive once the offshore wind facility is operational (Cronin et al., 2015). This study would advance understanding from predicted model behavior results to a real world application.

Objectives:

- Identify potential indicators for evaluating the impacts of the Block Island Wind Farm on recreation and tourism activities.
- Identify and analyze observed effects of the Block Island Wind Farm on recreation and tourism activities
- Provide a framework for tourism and recreation monitoring at other locations

Methods:

Researchers will conduct a content analysis of materials related to the development of the wind farm, such as state public hearing transcripts, public comments, and local news coverage to identify recreational and tourism-related issues, concerns, and potential indicators. The content analysis results will be used to help inform focus group questions and the general research framework.

Researchers will facilitate focus group discussions to gather input on perceived impacts from the tourism and recreational sectors, as well as the best method/indicators to track potential effects. As needed, the researchers will analyze datasets (e.g., rental property values, ferry ridership numbers) suggested by the participants.

Researchers will also conduct participant observations at key tourist sites adjacent to the Block Island Wind Farm. Participant observation will involve a range of methods including passive observation and engaging in open ended conversations. The ethnographic form of data collection is designed to gather information about the experience of tourist landscapes, *in situ* perception about selected aspects of the landscape and infrastructure, and the ways individuals behave in specific locations at a given moment.

Researchers will then develop indicators for BOEM to use in National Environmental Policy Act analyses to evaluate the effects of proposed offshore wind energy facility development.

References

Cronin, T., Ram, B., Gannon, J., Clausen, N-E., Thuesen, C., Maslesa, E., Gerald, J., 2015. Public acceptance of wind farm development: Developer practices and review of scientific literature. DTU Wind Energy E; No. 0051.

ICF, 2012. Atlantic Regional Wind Energy Development: Recreation and Tourism Economic Baseline Development. BOEM. OCS 2012-085.

Parsons, G., 2016. The Effect of Offshore Wind Power on Recreational Beach Use on the East Coast of the United States. BOEM Atlantic Science Forum. November.

Current Status: The Contractor has completed a draft literature review, a draft content analysis reviewing the *Block Island Times* and other newspapers, and draft report on the first year of observations. In December 2017, Dr. Amelia Moore presented on the project at [Southern New England Offshore Wind Energy Science Forum](#).

The Contractor is working on identification of a suite of indicators related to tourism and recreation. BOEM anticipates reviewing the draft report this Fall.

Final Report Due: December 31, 2018

Publications Completed: None

Affiliated WWW Sites: None

Revised Date: Aug. 3, 2018