Purpose of This Guide

State policies support robust public participation opportunities for comments and questions relevant to offshore wind development. Each state handles offshore wind regulations differently, and these policies’ complex, interwoven nature can make them confusing to the public. This guide aims to present a clear picture of how the public has shaped offshore wind siting in Rhode Island and how they can participate in offshore wind permitting processes in the future.

Your Feedback Makes a Difference

As evidenced in Rhode Island’s offshore wind siting processes to date, public feedback can help shape the development of offshore wind in Rhode Island while promoting the protection of the state’s unique coastal resources and reducing multiple-use conflicts on the ocean.

As Rhode Island continues to pursue its offshore wind procurement goals, public feedback plays a crucial part in promoting a responsible transition to offshore wind energy with the environmental and economic benefits it promises. Rhode Island state policies provide many offshore wind planning and project-level participation opportunities relevant to offshore wind to incorporate feedback to protect Rhode Island’s unique coastal resources and minimize conflicts with existing ocean uses.

Preparing for the First Rhode Island Wind Farm

The first Rhode Island Wind Farm will be the site of the first large-scale offshore wind project in the US. As an independent organization, we rely on fact-based research and multi-sector collaboration to provide expertise, analysis, information sharing, and strategic partnerships with industry, advocacy, and government stakeholders to build understanding and drive the development of offshore wind. This work is guided by a Steering Committee of diverse interests, including representation from offshore wind developers, NGOs, and federal and state policymakers. We are funded by private foundations, do not offer memberships, and have no contractual obligations to any members in the OSW sector, all of which support our objectivity and unique approach to our work.

About the Special Initiative on Offshore Wind

The Special Initiative on Offshore Wind (SIOW) is a leader in advancing offshore wind in the US. As an independent organization, we rely on fact-based research and multi-sector collaboration to provide expertise, analysis, information sharing, and strategic partnerships with industry, advocacy, and government stakeholders to build understanding and drive the deployment of offshore wind projects. We are guided by a Steering Committee of diverse interests, including representation from offshore wind developers, NGOs, and federal and state policymakers. We are funded by private foundations, do not offer memberships, and have no contractual obligations to any members in the OSW sector, all of which support our objectivity and unique approach to our work.
Rhode Island Offshore Wind Public Participation Opportunities

Federal Consistency Review

Under the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) has review authority for proposed federal actions or federal license or permit applications, including those for offshore wind, that have reasonably foreseeable effects on Rhode Island's coastal uses or resources. Per this review authority, the CRMC reviews such proposed federal activities for consistency with the state's enforceable coastal management policies.

Currently, all planned offshore wind projects are located within federal waters on the Outer Continental Shelf. The CRMC's review authority applies to federal activities within the state's coastal zone or in federal waters beyond the state's jurisdiction if such activities may have reasonably foreseeable effects on Rhode Island's coastal uses and resources. The CRMC provides public participation opportunities through its federal consistency review process pursuant to the CZMA.

The following permits or approvals only apply if a portion of an offshore wind project, such as an export cable, falls within state lands or jurisdictional waters. Each approval and permit serves a different purpose in ensuring the conservation of Rhode Island's natural resources for the benefit of the people of Rhode Island. It is at the discretion of the offshore wind developer as to the timing of submitting the applications for these permits and approvals as they must navigate both federal and states processes while weighing other project considerations.

Following the submission of an application, a public notice that the application is available for public review will be posted. Public notices are issued in writing to addressees and may be posted in a newspaper in circulation within the proposed project area. A 30-day public comment period or public hearing will be held once a public notice has been issued, depending on the permit or approval. In some cases, a public hearing may also be held if requested during the public comment period, or the RDEM or CRMC decides one should be held.

More information about the offshore wind leasing process and public participation opportunities can be found at the following resources:

Rhode Island Wind Energy website: The site provides information on wind energy in Rhode Island including the current market, programs, incentives, and other resources. Visit the website here: http://www.energy.ri.gov/renewable-energy/wind/