

Federal agency releases finding of no significant environmental impact with Lake Erie wind turbine project

CLEVELAND – Oct. 3, 2018 – An exhaustive and thorough federal review of the proposed Icebreaker Lake Erie wind energy project that spanned more than two years found no significant environmental impacts. The report states that the project would not significantly affect migratory birds.

The U.S. Department of Energy conducted the review in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Coast Guard and other federal entities. The agencies released the final Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on October 2, 2018.

“The proposed project will not significantly adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or any critical habitat,” an overview of the EA states. “The Environmental Assessment evaluated potential impacts to migratory birds and concluded, primarily due to the small size of the project, that there would be both short and long-term impact but those impacts would be minor. There would be no potential for population-level impacts to any species of bird as a result of the proposed project.”

“The beneficial impacts of the proposed project would include a contribution toward the reduction of regional greenhouse gas emissions, diversification of regional energy supply and economic revitalization of key sectors of the regional economy,” the overview stated.

The six-turbine project, dubbed Icebreaker Wind, would be located eight miles off the coast of downtown Cleveland. It would be the first fresh-water wind energy installation in North America.

The federal report represents an important milestone for the project, which has undergone numerous, intensive local, state and federal governmental reviews.

“This is the most significant single approval Icebreaker Wind has received to date,” said Dr. Lorry Wagner, President of the non-profit, Cleveland-based Lake Erie Energy Development Corporation (LEEDCo) – which is developing Icebreaker Wind with Fred. Olsen Renewables USA.

“The Department of Energy did an extraordinarily thorough review, and worked with a host of other federal agencies – including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We are eager now to earn state approval and move forward. This progressive, clean energy project has already attracted positive international attention for Cleveland. It stands to establish our region as a leader in the exploding offshore wind energy sector, and will yield both environmental and economic benefits for Greater Cleveland,” said Dr. Wagner.

Icebreaker Wind is being actively opposed by a large coal company at the state level.

According to Jocelyn Travis, Sierra Club Ready For 100 Campaign Manager, “Sierra Club has been a strong supporter of Icebreaker and of the development of a clean energy industry in Lake Erie to help combat air and water pollution and climate change. This Icebreaker Wind EA and FONSI is an important step toward realization of Mayor Jackson’s goal to have Cleveland be 100% renewable power by 2050.”

Other notable points within the federal overview:

- “The proposed wind turbine generators and the proposed substation would be visible from the shoreline. However, due to the distance that the wind turbine generators would be constructed from shore and the existing industrial uses of the proposed onshore project sites, adverse visual impacts associated with the proposed project would be minor.”
- “The proposed project would not cause any significant adverse effects nationally, within the Great Lakes region or the onshore or offshore area within or near the proposed project area.”
- “While this would be the first offshore wind project in the Great Lakes, potential impacts associated with construction and operation of the project are understood and are largely similar to land-based projects in the Great Lakes region, the existing offshore wind project off the coast of Rhode Island and offshore wind projects that have been deployed in Europe. Impacts associated with the proposed turbine foundations are expected to be similar to, but overall less than, those observed for offshore oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico and offshore wind facilities in Europe.”

Icebreaker Wind enjoys wide support from a wide range of environmental groups, including:

- Sierra Club
- Ohio Environmental Council
- Ohio Citizen Action
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Green Energy Ohio
- Mom’s Clean Air Force
- League of Women Voters
- Ohio Interfaith Power and Light

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