



## What's Next for Offshore Energy?

On the Atlantic Coast, offshore oil drilling is out—and wind energy is in.

by Mariam Baksh  
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On Dec. 1, Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar announced that President Obama and his administration are reversing plans, made earlier in March, to expand offshore drilling to the Atlantic Coast—preventing oil exploration there for another seven years. Meanwhile, coastal communities are making significant investments in another form of offshore energy: wind power.

### Choosing Coastal Health Over Oil

Sadly, it took [the loss of 11 lives and thousands of livelihoods in coastal communities along the Gulf coast](#) to spur the turnaround. A tragic reminder that drilling is a dirty and dangerous business, the BP disaster made it abundantly clear that the only way to truly keep our coasts and ocean ecosystems safe is to keep them free of oil rigs. In making his decision, Secretary Salazar looked at the science, analyzed the economics, and listened to the outpouring of opposition to offshore drilling from around the country and world.

The Obama administration realizes the incredible value that clean oceans and beaches represent. In states that were under consideration for expanded offshore drilling, coastal tourism and fishing generate more than \$200 billion annually and provide 4.1 million jobs, according to [Too Much at Stake](#), a new report released by Environment America and the Sierra Club.

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In fact, according to government estimates of oil and gas reserves, the annual value of sustainable businesses dependent on clean beaches and oceans is four times larger than the value of any oil and gas that may lie offshore. Atlantic, Pacific, and eastern Gulf Coast jobs in these businesses would not exist without clean beaches and a clean ocean, both of which would be threatened by offshore drilling.

### A Cleaner Alternative

Secretary Salazar made it clear that it is the duty of the Department of the Interior not only to protect our oceans and coastal communities, but also to meet our energy needs. One week before the announcement to reinstate the ban on drilling, he vowed to move forward on offshore [wind power](#), pledging to pinpoint areas with excellent potential for producing wind energy and to accelerate the

permitting process.

### A Different Kind



### of Ownership Society

The most innovative thing about this wind farm isn't how it works, but who owns it.

Offshore wind is one of America's greatest untapped resources. The achievable wind capacity off our coasts is nearly 900,000 megawatts, nearly enough to meet the entire country's current electricity needs. Offshore wind is particularly appealing because it can be located relatively close to major population centers along coasts, reducing the need for large transmission lines across our landscape.

Up and down the Atlantic coast, states and offshore wind developers are making significant progress in [advancing offshore projects](#), according to a new report. The report finds up to six gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind projects have been proposed along the Atlantic coast—the equivalent of about five coal-fired power plants and enough to power about 1.5 million average U.S. homes. Based on government analysis, the Atlantic Ocean has significant offshore wind potential, with over 212 GW of wind resources in shallow waters where current technology is best suited.

The report, [\*Offshore Wind in the Atlantic: Growing Momentum for Jobs, Energy Independence, Clean Air, and Wildlife Protection\*](#), makes the following key findings:

- **From Maine to Georgia, every state with significant offshore wind resources has taken steps forward on offshore wind.** Northern states (Maine to Delaware) have the most advanced projects while southern states (Maryland to Georgia) are quickly mobilizing on a series of projects.
- **The Atlantic's shallow water characteristics combined with excellent wind speed make it an ideal location for offshore wind farms.** 93 percent (42 out of the 45) of offshore wind projects worldwide are in shallow waters (zero to 30 meters deep). Close to half of the United States' shallow water offshore wind is along the Atlantic coast.
- **While the most extensive European study concluded that offshore wind farms do not appear to have long-term or large-scale ecological impacts, major data gaps for the Atlantic Ocean still exist and site-specific impacts need to be evaluated.** A coordinated, comprehensive, and well-funded effort is needed to address these gaps and improve the permitting process.

Faced with a choice about the future of energy production along the Atlantic Coast, both the Obama administration and coastal states are making the right decision in choosing renewable wind energy over a reliance on expanded drilling for dirty fossil fuels. This is a triumph of common sense policy in our fight against global warming and a clear win for coastal residents, economies, and ecosystems.



Mariam Baksh wrote this article for [YES! Magazine](#), a national, nonprofit media organization that fuses powerful ideas with practical actions. Mariam is a communications associate with

[Environment America.](#)

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- [13 Best Energy Ideas \(and a Few Duds\)](#): Investment in energy projects will total \$16 trillion in the next two decades. Sarah van Gelder lays out over a dozen sustainable energy policies and technologies that can make our infrastructure more climate friendly.
- [Victory Bonds for Clean Energy](#): What if Americans could support a clean energy future the way they once supported the U.S. war effort?

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