



LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

The voice of Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources since 1940.

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Resolution No. 2, 2024

SUBJECT: CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACTS OF OFFSHORE WIND IN NEARSHORE LOUISIANA STATE WATERS

WHEREAS, On August 19, 2020, Governor John Bel Edwards signed Executive Order JBE-2020-18, establishing the Climate Initiatives Task Force to develop a plan with recommendations to meet a net-zero goal for greenhouse gas emissions by 2050; and

WHEREAS, in 2022, Louisiana passed legislation to enable exploration and production of offshore wind energy in nearshore state waters, followed by legislative appropriations in 2023 to fund the Louisiana Comprehensive Roadmap for offshore wind; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana's first Climate Action Plan was approved on January 31, 2022; and

WHEREAS, the Climate Action Plan includes an offshore wind power generation goal of 5 gigawatts by 2035; and

WHEREAS, on December 13, 2023, the Louisiana State Mineral & Energy Board approved two operating agreements for offshore wind projects in nearshore state waters (within 3 nautical miles from shore); and

WHEREAS, Cajun Wind, LLC was approved for a 59,653-acre property agreement off the coast of Cameron Parish; and

WHEREAS, Diamond Offshore Wind, LLC (DOW LA Gulf Wind) was approved for a for a 6,162-acre property agreement off the coast of Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes; and

WHEREAS, these agreements allow the projects to begin more detailed site assessments but do not guarantee future permitting of these projects for development; and

WHEREAS, the offshore wind leasing process for projects in state waters by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources is quite different from the federal process under the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM); and

WHEREAS, BOEM's process for offshore wind leasing in federal waters identifies potential lease areas through a robust scientific analysis and then allows companies to bid for areas to develop; and

WHEREAS, the LDNR process for nearshore development in state waters allows companies to explore development in any area of the coast, including areas that likely have conflicts with wildlife; and

WHEREAS, during the federal comment process for siting offshore wind in the Gulf of Mexico, in which BOEM solicited stakeholder and expert input to help inform its siting decisions, LWF joined other concerned groups cautioning against permitting offshore wind turbines within 20

nautical miles (which would automatically omit all state waters) from shore to protect marine mammal, neotropical migrants, coastal and marine birds, and wintering waterfowl; and

WHEREAS, responsible offshore wind development follows the mitigation hierarchy to first avoid, then minimize and mitigate impacts from development; and

WHEREAS, siting of offshore wind turbines in nearshore waters is extremely rare (and usually for the purpose of conducting research) as it often poses greater risks to wildlife and habitats; and

WHEREAS, approximately 2.1 billion birds migrate across the Gulf of Mexico annually; and

WHEREAS, habitats in the Mississippi Flyway are utilized by 60% of North American bird species; and

WHEREAS, an estimated 100 million migratory, nesting, and wintering birds rely on Louisiana's coast annually, including species listed and protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), such as piping plover (endangered), red knot (threatened), and eastern black rail (threatened), as well as candidate species such as the golden-winged warbler; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana hosts a significant percentage of many populations of colonial waterbird species found in the northern Gulf of Mexico, including sandwich terns (83%), Forster's terns (71%), royal terns (51%), tricolored herons (48%), brown pelicans (47%), and black skimmers (44%), among others; and

WHEREAS, a brief submitted by the National Audubon Society to the Mineral & Energy Board at their August 9, 2023 board meeting highlighted threats to Louisiana's state bird, the Brown Pelican, from offshore wind energy development in nearshore waters; and

WHEREAS, these threats include collision risk of pelicans with turbine blades due to high densities of pelicans in shallow, nearshore waters; the overlap of wind project areas with pelicans' primary prey source, Gulf menhaden; and collision risk due to the V-formation flying of flocks, among other factors; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana has invested significant resources to restore habitat for these birds, including restoration of Queen Bess Island, Rabbit Island, and Raccoon Island; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) provided a presentation to the State Mineral and Energy Board on October 11, 2023 highlighting their concerns about potential impacts of offshore wind energy development in nearshore waters to birds; and

WHEREAS, LDWF identified critical data gaps including flight altitude and migration pathways for migrant species, home range size, foraging distance, and flight behaviors for colonial waterbirds as well as identification of activity hotspots; and

WHEREAS, five of the world's seven sea turtle species inhabit the Gulf of Mexico year-round, and all five of these species are protected by under the ESA: leatherbacks (endangered),

loggerheads (threatened), Kemp's ridleys (critically endangered), green (threatened), and hawksbill (endangered); and

WHEREAS, nearshore Louisiana waters are home to two coastal fish species that are protected under the ESA: giant manta rays(threatened) and Gulf sturgeon (threatened); and

WHEREAS, long-distance seasonal migrating bats are the most vulnerable to fatalities with wind energy infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, monarch butterflies (a candidate species under the ESA) have an extensive migration of up to 3,000 miles from Canada to Mexico and back; and

WHEREAS, on November 8, 2023, the Louisiana Department of Energy and Natural Resources (LDENR) released a Request for Information for the Louisiana Comprehensive Wind Roadmap to provide a path to guide offshore wind investments, support and secure necessary supply chains, identify potential opportunities to achieve policy objectives, and coordinate a complex network of stakeholders and actions moving forward; and

WHEREAS, there is currently a considerable lack of information regarding impacts of offshore wind energy development to Louisiana's nearshore wildlife and coastal resources, making an effective leasing and permitting process impossible at this time.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Louisiana Wildlife Federation urges the utilization of spatial justification for offshore wind development and additional research on impacts to birds and other potentially impacted wildlife and their habitats to fill data gaps and inform responsible decision making.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Louisiana Wildlife Federation urges LDENR to consult regularly with LDWF when considering permits for any projects and to ensure those permits meet LDWF's standards for protection of wildlife and their habitat.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Louisiana Wildlife Federation urges the collection of sufficient scientific reference points to demonstrate the principles of avoidance and mitigation prior to any consideration of permits for offshore wind energy projects in nearshore waters.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Louisiana Wildlife Federation suggests permitting agencies first review spatial planning analysis in the forthcoming Louisiana Comprehensive Wind Roadmap prior to any site selection processes or the approval of any permits for development of offshore wind energy projects in nearshore waters.

Adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation Board of Directors on February 5, 2024.