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Study: Coos Bay well positioned to host offshore wind farm

By DAVID RUPKALVIS

One week after the federal government issued a call for offshore wind energy along the Oregon coast, a company that develops offshore wind farms said the Port of Coos Bay is perfectly suited to be a site for such a farm.



On February 25, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management issued more than one call area off the Oregon coast, citing high wind potential. The call area is the beginning stage for allowing wind farms to be placed in the ocean.

Last week, TotalEnergies SBE US, a joint venture between TotalEnergies, a global multi-energy company, and Simply Blue Group, a pioneer in floating offshore wind, released a study indicating the Port of Coos Bay might be the best place to place such a wind farm.

Alana Duerr, the director of U.S. projects for Total Energies SBE US, said Coos Bay has all the elements needed to host a successful wind farm.

"This study shows that the Port of Coos Bay is the only deepwater port in Oregon, and one of a limited number on the West Coast, with enough available space for facilities to deploy large-scale floating offshore wind turbines and deliver gigawatts of clean electricity for Oregon and other West Coast markets," Duerr said.

Duerr said offshore wind farms are the next step toward creating renewable energy. Along the East Coast, farms are being put in place with a goal of making 30 gigawatts of electricity every year. One gigawatt of electricity can power up to 750,000 homes.

Duerr said the move toward offshore wind farms is very early in Oregon, but she feels Coos Bay is an ideal spot to host a farm.

"We looked at different activities that could possibly happen that you would need a port for," Duerr said.

What she found was the deep water in Coos Bay and available land along the port would be ideal to host the manufacturing, building, positioning and maintenance needed for a wind farm.

"Coos Bay has the spot available that is on the ocean side of bridges," Duerr said. "The channel as it currently sits can support some projects, but with the channel widening that is planned, it would be ideal."

The study showed the Port of Coos Bay is:

The only port in Oregon, and one of the few on the West Coast, with both the depth and potential space for all the capabilities needed to be a major hub for supporting offshore wind. Various other Oregon ports may be used for operations and maintenance of offshore wind.

With targeted investments, a major offshore wind hub at the Port of Coos Bay may include turbine manufacturing, foundation fabrication, staging for assembly, mounting turbines, deployment, and operations and maintenance. The planned channel widening will also allow for substructures to be towed in and out of the port.

The investments to build an offshore wind integration facility at Coos Bay – capable of assembling large 10 to 20-megawatt floating wind turbines – are estimated at \$475 million, which would include a new wharf, upland preparation, storage facilities and local dredging.

Duerr said the BOEM is expected to have an auction for offshore wind farms by the end of 2023, with a potential wind farm opening by late this decade.

She also said TotalEnergies SBE US has already has discussions with the International Port of Coos Bay, and she feels the potential wind farm would work well with the port's announced plan of opening an inter-model shipping facility.

"The Port of Coos Bay and its harbor offer a distinct advantage on the Oregon and Northern California coast to support the various requirements for the development of a robust floating offshore wind energy sector," said John Burns, CEO at the International Port of Coos Bay. "We are very excited to play a part in the quest to create new opportunities to build our economy while developing a new source of clean, sustainable energy."

If a farm is built, the closest turbine would be located 12 miles offshore, but that could change. Duerr said there have been some concerns voiced by the fishing industry, but both BOEM and TotalEnergies SBE US would work with all stakeholders before moving forward.

"This will be a very public process every step of the way," she said. "We're looking forward to engaging with the Oregon community. We think it's going to be a great opportunity for Southern Oregon."

The study results were exciting news for many in Oregon.

"Experts confirm that Oregon and the Port of Coos Bay are strategically positioned to tap into some of the world's best offshore wind resources off its South Coast," said Shaun Gibbs, executive director of Oregon's South Coast Development Council. "This study will help private industry understand the investments needed to develop this important renewable resource, and create long-term jobs and an economic asset on the Southern Oregon coast to realize the state's clean energy goals."