

NYSERDA Announces Completion of First Year of Aerial Surveys of Wildlife in Offshore Wind Area

NYSERDA pursuing responsible offshore wind development with 20 studies being conducted in the state's quest to develop 2.4 gigawatts

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The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) has completed the first of three years of data collection via aerial surveys of birds and marine mammals as the state pursues its goal of achieving 50 percent of its electricity from renewable resources by 2030.

Offshore wind is a key component of Governor Andrew Cuomo's clean energy strategy, with a goal of building 2.4 gigawatts.

NYSERDA President and CEO Alicia Barton said, "This survey underscores the importance of our commitment to the preservation of the wildlife in our coastal areas and our commitment to environmental stewardship as we develop offshore wind. The State is undertaking a series of studies to ensure that offshore wind is a win for New York's environment from both a carbon reduction standpoint and a resource preservation standpoint."

NYSERDA is acquiring this regional-scale baseline information on seasonal wildlife distribution, abundance and movement over a 16,000-square mile area to aid in responsible offshore wind site assessment and project

development. The potential effects of individual offshore wind projects, as well as any possible cumulative effects of multiple projects, will be better understood with this data. The Authority and other state agencies are developing the New York Offshore Wind Master Plan, due by the end of the year, to guide development.

The survey is gathering the highest resolution images ever for a project of this scale. With each pixel corresponding to 1.5 centimeters on the ocean surface, the images provide sufficient detail to allow taxonomists to identify the species for an extremely high percentage of the birds and marine animals.

Bird species identified include shearwaters, double-crested cormorant, petrels, gulls, and terns. Remarkable as these images are, however, it is important to note that the vast majority of the images (more than 90%) show no birds or marine animals at or near the water surface. As the survey progresses, distribution of organisms will be evaluated for patterns to aid in identification of areas of lower biological activity where offshore wind development may be feasible.

A [website](#) has been developed for the project that allows the public to see some of the different animals that have been recorded. The aerial surveys are being conducted in coordination with other research, including visual surveys being conducted by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and federal entities.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Basil Seggos said, "Responsibly sited renewable energy development is a critical part of Governor Cuomo's comprehensive efforts to tackle climate change. NYSERDA's aerial survey of wildlife in New York's Atlantic coast will help identify sensitive offshore habitats that potential energy developments should avoid. We look forward to working with our

partners at NYSERDA, DOS, the commercial fishing industry, and other partners to ensure potential energy developments do not degrade our economically important marine ecosystem."

NYSERDA's study is being carried out by Normandeau Associates, Inc. and APEM Ltd. It is one of more than 20 studies NYSERDA is undertaking to provide current information about potential environmental and social sensitivities, economic and practical considerations, and regulatory requirements associated with offshore wind energy development. These studies cover topics such as fish and fisheries, marine wildlife, sediments, port infrastructure and permitting.

Julia Robinson Willmott, project technical director for Normandeau, said: "It has been fascinating to see the natural fluctuations in animal density and distribution during the first year of this project. In addition to the animals targeted in the study, we are mapping fish shoals and boats, because we want to get as much information from the data as possible.

APEM's project manager Dr. Stephanie McGovern said, "The images are amazing and we are cataloguing a diverse array of wildlife species over a wide area, with a coverage and definition that has never before been achieved in the United States or anywhere else in the world.

APEM has begun surveying for the project using a newly developed camera system, Shearwater III, which was developed to push image resolutions to as low as 0.5 cm resolution. APEM is carrying out the surveys and the images are then analyzed by experts at Normandeau and APEM to identify birds and other marine species.

In a series of [reports](#) issued this week, the U.S. Department of Energy lauded New York's commitment to develop its wind resources, including the great potential off Long Island.

About NYSERDA

NYSERDA, a public benefit corporation, offers objective information and analysis, innovative programs, technical expertise, and funding to help New Yorkers increase energy efficiency, save money, use renewable energy, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. NYSERDA professionals work to protect the environment and create clean-energy jobs. NYSERDA has been developing partnerships to advance innovative energy solutions in New York State since 1975. To learn more about NYSERDA's programs and funding opportunities, visit nyserda.ny.gov or follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), or [Instagram](#).

About Normandeau

Normandeau is a leading U.S. environmental and regulatory consultancy with special expertise in developing innovative technology solutions for answering biological questions. APEM is the world's leading supplier of aerial bird and marine mammal surveys for the offshore renewables industry, having carried out over 1,000 surveys.

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